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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

August
1993

INCORPORATING

MILLION

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT POPULAR FICTION

Stories by
**Robert Holdstock
& Garry Kilworth**
plus **Chris Beckett**
Julian Flood
and others

Non-fiction by
Brian Stableford
Nick Lowe
John Clute
and others



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Important Notice to Librarians and to All Subscribers to MILLION

With effect from this issue, *MILLION* has combined with *Interzone*.

So, as well as being *Interzone* number 74, this is *MILLION* number 15 (July-August 1993). Henceforth, *MILLION: The Magazine About Popular Fiction* will have no separate existence. I deeply regret the necessity for this move, but in the end the struggle to keep *MILLION* afloat financially proved unequal. The subscription base never rose above 700, and the magazine needed at least twice as many subscribers to be viable. Moreover, bookshop sales were generally poor and advertising revenue was almost non-existent.

Many of those who did subscribe, including a number of public librarians, were very enthusiastic about *MILLION*; but, alas, we received little support from the academic sector – or from a wider public. I apologize to the magazine's keen readers, and hope that they will find much to interest them in *Interzone*. We shall continue to run the "Yesterday's Bestsellers" series of essays by Brian Stableford in this magazine, and a number of other features which have been planned for the pages of *MILLION* will appear here in the coming months.

Everyone whose subscription has not expired will continue to receive *Interzone*; and all those who were already subscribers to both magazines (about a hundred of you) will have your existing *Interzone* subs extended by the number of issues that your *MILLION* subscriptions still had to run. We are merging the two lists by hand, so it's possible that errors may arise: please inform us if you have received two copies of this issue by mistake and we'll credit your subscription by one (but don't bother to return the extra magazine; please pass it on to anyone else who may be interested). We still have supplies of all past issues of *MILLION*, so any subscriber whose run is incomplete, and who would prefer to receive back-issues of that magazine in lieu of future copies of *Interzone*, is welcome to let us know: we'll certainly oblige by sending you the issues you may require.

I'd like to say a heartfelt "thank you" to all those who helped me with *MILLION* over the past two-and-a-half-years. Foremost among them are associate editor Kim Newman and advisory editors Mike Ashley, Clive Bloom, Mary Cadogan, Kathy Gale, Maxim Jakubowski and Brian Stableford. Their contributions and advice were much appreciated, as were those of such regular contributors and supporters as Jack Adrian, Graham Andrews, Guy Barefoot, June Barraclough, Wendy Bradley, Mat Coward, Pete Crowther, Jay Dixon, Martin Edwards, Ruth Eglesfield, Peter Berresford Ellis, S.T. Joshi, Andy Lane, Dave Langford, James Miller, Mark Morris, Stan Nicholls, Andy Sawyer, Gordon Wells and Brendan Wignall. Special thanks also to such "outside" supporters as Ed Gorman and Fred Nolan, and to all those writers and publishers – too many to name, but you know who you are – who wished the magazine well.

Finally, a word of assurance to *Interzone* readers: this magazine will not change its nature, although by combining with *MILLION* it has gained more than 500 new readers for the coming months.

(David Pringle)

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 74

August 1993

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Two Obituaries

by John Clute

Avram Davidson

To be misunderstood, it seems, was Avram Davidson's chosen and cherished fate. As a writer and editor of science fiction and fantasy in the United States from about 1950 on, he began several successful careers; but truncated each one before his audience began to know what to expect. He was an expert creator of baroque space opera; but abandoned the genre suddenly, subsequently bestowing upon his bewildered readership several fantasies of a sometimes daunting discursiveness. Each of these fantasies demonstrated his great powers as a fabulist; but he never finished any of them. His best novels remain half-told.

He was vastly erudite, in a scatter-shot and medieval fashion, sounding sometimes rather like a blind man trying to describe a dragon; but he wrote dozens of short stories for a market – the science fiction and fantasy magazines of the 1950s and 1960s – which tended to buy work marked by neatness, concision, and plot. He was raised as an Orthodox Jew; but his best work was iridescently pagan.

Avram Davidson was born in 1923 in Yonkers, a dozen miles upriver from Manhattan, and spent much of his life in New York. He served with the Israeli Army in 1948-49. He began to write seriously in the early 1950s. His success was immediate, though typically scattered. He won Hugo and World Fantasy Awards for short work, a collection of stories, and for editing *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. He won an Ellery Queen Award (he also published two novels as Ellery Queen) and the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award. Several times he was almost famous; several times he dodged the limelight.

His first novel, *Joyleg* (1962) with Ward Moore, was an exuberant tall-tale fantasy whose backwoods Tennessee protagonist is kept indefinitely young by moonshine liquor; it was followed by several fantasy-tinged space operas, the best of which – *Rogue Dragon* (1965) and *Masters of the Maze* (1965) – tend to subvert the traditional heroics of the genre, while at the same time engagingly energetic as stories. But he stopped.

From the mid-1960s to the end of his life, Davidson did not publish one single "normal" novel. It is the best of this late work – along with short stories published in collections like *Or All the Seas with Oysters* (1962) and *The Redward Edward Papers* (1978) – that has so deepened the impact upon

the world of letters, and upon his fellow writers, of this most perversely elusive of figures.

The Phoenix and the Mirror (1969) and its companion piece, *Vergil in Averno* (1987), two typical late novels, are opulent, antiquarian delights, redolent of the Arabian Nights; any slippage into chinoiserie, however, is balanced by a chastened wisdom about the ironies of the mortal world. Davidson's masterpiece is probably *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy* (1990), a collection of linked stories written over many years and set in a Ruritania enclave haunted by history and death. In these stories, genre fiction meets Umberto Eco.

Bearded and gruff and Talmudic, Davidson became a cantankerous old man. In his last unwell years he tended to feel, not entirely without justice, a sense of personal isolation. But his work had already become a central taproot for the late 20th-century imagination. Now, its shoots are everywhere.

Lester Del Rey

Nothing more vividly emphasizes the youngness of American science fiction than the deaths of those who ran it from the start. Lester Del Rey was involved in the genre from the 1930s until a few months ago, and over the course of a highly successful life as writer and publisher became one of the figures who symbolized the life story of the form. Pulp science fiction began in enthusiastic obscurity, soon turned into a secret tale of the future for thousands, and suddenly exploded into highly profitable, multi-media visibility over the last two decades of the century. In a way, this is his story, too.

Lester Del Rey was born Ramon Felipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Smith Heathcourt-Brace Sierra y Alvarez-del-Rey de los Verdes in 1915, in Minnesota, to a poor family. He became a science-fiction fan in 1931, did not finish college, took a variety of odd jobs, and began to publish fiction professionally in 1938. For many years he wrote stories and novels, some of them still well-known, while at the same time editing, with intermittent success, a variety of genre magazines. In the early 1970s, Judy-Lynn Del Rey (his fourth wife) became sf editor for the prestigious Ballantine Books, a branch of Random House; in 1977, he joined her as fantasy editor of a new

Ballantine imprint, Del Rey Books.

Over the next fifteen years he and Judy-Lynn, who died in 1986, showed an uncanny capacity to find and publish bestsellers, and to promote the writers they had discovered into household names. Their discoveries included huge-selling fantasy authors like Terry Brooks, Stephen Donaldson and David Eddings. Established writers as well – like Arthur C. Clarke and Frederik Pohl – found streams of new readers. Del Rey Books soon became the dominant science-fiction and fantasy imprint in the United States, and its editors were probably more responsible than anyone – with the possible exceptions of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg – for the huge popularity of the genre in the 1980s.

For good or for ill, Lester and Judy-Lynn Del Rey had helped transform an enclave enterprise into a marketing juggernaut; in the process, it may be, they were also responsible in part for the loss the genre's old biting edge, for they were not much interested in work which threatened the status quo. The success of Del Rey Books, as a publisher of commodity fiction, seemed symptomatic of a general 1980s sense that science fiction had begun to age prematurely. In the 1990s, as younger authors began to reshape the genre, the imprint became less dominant.

As a fiction writer, Del Rey had a relatively short career, though a prolific one. His first 38 stories – including the famous "Helen O'Loy" (1938), about a female robot who commits suttee when her husband/owner dies – were all written for John W. Campbell, Jr., the important editor whose *Astounding Science Fiction* dominated the "Golden Age" of the genre in the early 1940s. For Campbell he also wrote a short version of what eventually became his starkest novel, *Nerves* (1956), about a dangerous mishap at a nuclear-power plant. Other novels, like *Police Your Planet* (1956), or *Siege Perilous* (1966) with Paul W. Fairman, demonstrated a cunning grasp of narrative, but perhaps an ultimately fatal lack of conviction. Most of his late books, written for children, were in fact ghosted by Fairman. Del Rey wrote very little solo fiction after about 1960.

His feelings about the history of the genre to which he had dedicated his life were made clear in *The World of Science Fiction 1926-1976: The History of a Subculture* (1979), where he demonstrated that the various revolts and New Waves of science fiction's

maturity had little to interest him. His loyalty remained with the pure pulp of his youth, the tales of breakthroughs read in secret by adolescents dreaming of the shape of things to come. Ironically, Del Rey Books was instrumental in a process through which that pulp tradition became an entertainment industry with little room for revolts or breakthroughs.

Lester Del Rey retired in 1991. It is not known what he came to think of what he had made.

(John Clute)

Avram Davidson and Lester Del Rey both died in May 1993. The above pieces first appeared in The Independent newspaper.

Interaction

Dear Editors:

Interzone has to be congratulated. When other sf mags crumble or fail to appear (*The Gate* no more, *New Moon* and, sadly, *Trevor Jones* no more, *Far Point* no more; to mention only a few who sought to be your potential rivals) you keep plugging away, giving us our monthly fix with a regularity that borders on the astounding. (You may consider that a pun.)

For a while I thought you had lost your way a little, but recent issues have been solid, worthwhile, even earnest – I'll forgive you "Horse Meat" but I really don't think Brian Aldiss's post-hoc rationalization holds water, and "Irene's Song" by Astrid Julian struck a sour note with its special pleading for hard-done-by mid-20th-century Mittel-European Germans. (I know the particular ones portrayed may not have committed atrocities, but other Germans did, and a measure of revenge was surely to be expected. And I suspect that Yugoslav Germans did well out of the occupation. If we're looking for truly innocent parties in this context how about the Volga Germans? Not to mention a million or so Gypsies, six million Jews etc.)

Nevertheless, ten years and still going strong. Just by being there, you have acted as a spur and a target to aim at. (Though I have not yet succeeded in getting a story of mine into *IZ* I count myself among the number to whom you gave hope that they might be published.) You have brought on and given voice to a succession of new writers, encouraging those like me for whom the uncertainties of a transatlantic welcome might have been too daunting.

And occasionally you publish a wee gem.

Which brings me to "Burning Bright" by Fergus Bannon (*IZ* 71). The story was by no means brilliant and

had its flaws but you can have no idea what personal delight it gave me. It was as quintessential a piece of Scottish science fiction as I could ever have hoped to see, and I don't think it's one that would have been written in that form by an English sf writer. (I'm making an assumption about Fergus Bannon here but from the author's note it would seem to be justified.) Consider: the story is about things which don't belong, and you can't get rid of, setting limits to your freedom of action. Now look at that scenario as an allegory – intended or not.

I once read a rock review which berated certain Scottish bands for a fascination with Americana – down to the level of taking their names from American states or obscure Steely Dan songs. That this criticism ignored the tremendous affinities between the folk music of the two countries was beside the point. I suspect the real reason is one of identity. If you are going to be culturally colonized you might as well choose which culture to be colonized by. Most Scots consciously or unconsciously resent "English" culture, which is distinct, being reinforced daily by the media of the "United" Kingdom and the sheer blind indifference they display. In the circumstances a fascination with Americana is not to be wondered at: nor is a tendency to write tales of frustration.

There is a story I have long wanted to write but I never felt ready to do it justice. When I do, it will be sub-titled "A Scottish Science Fiction Story" and perhaps no-one but me will perceive it as such. Maybe Fergus Bannon has tapped a similar well. He has certainly given me a peculiar satisfaction.

Jack Deighton
Kirkcaldy, Fife

Editor: Hmm. I'm not sure about all this talk of national characteristics. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is potentially as "multi-ethnic" as the former Yugoslavia, which should be a dreadful warning to us all – not just to those Eastern countries which we like to think of as peculiarly benighted. (And I speak as a Scots-born son of a "mixed marriage," now living in England and married to a Yorkshirewoman of Irish descent...)

Dear Editors:

I do not wish to keep the great Aldiss controversy dragging *ad nauseam* (a particularly apposite phrase here), but I had to write to say how amusing I found David Logan's letter in issue 72. The gist of this seemed to be that you should be as controversial as possible – so long as you don't actually publish anything that Mr Logan disagrees with.

That's one of the great problems in the pro-or-anti censorship debate, of

course; a lot of people love to see other people shocked, but hate to see their own beliefs and prejudices challenged. I've no wish to see *Interzone* publishing Nazi propaganda, but perhaps the likes of Mr Logan could recognize that, as soon as you accept the need to draw any lines (and I do too), then the question of where they should be is going to be purely subjective. And perhaps my subjectivity is worth just as much as yours, his, or Joseph Stalin's. I wouldn't pretend to know how you decide.

But perhaps *Interzone*, an sf/fantasy magazine, isn't the best place to challenge standards of taste concerning violence (sexual or otherwise). To steal an idea from Peter Nicholls (in the new edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*), perhaps you ought to look for a story attacking the theory of global warming, with its rather skimpy evidential underpinning. Now there's an sf taboo.

Phil Masters
Baldock, Herts

Dear Editors:

I continue to follow the "Horse Meat" controversy with something bordering on amazement. You certainly managed to shake the readers up, which needs doing every once in a while. Let me just add that I appreciate the sort of editorial courage it took to publish that story. What Aldiss has done is honestly depict the kind of dark age which necessarily must precede all those almost Arcadian de-industrialized, post-holocaust futures so beloved of sf writers. He's shown what it would cost to get from here to there. The result is a genuinely dangerous story, subversive to unexamined assumptions.

I am glad there are still editors in our field willing to take such risks, and I commend you.

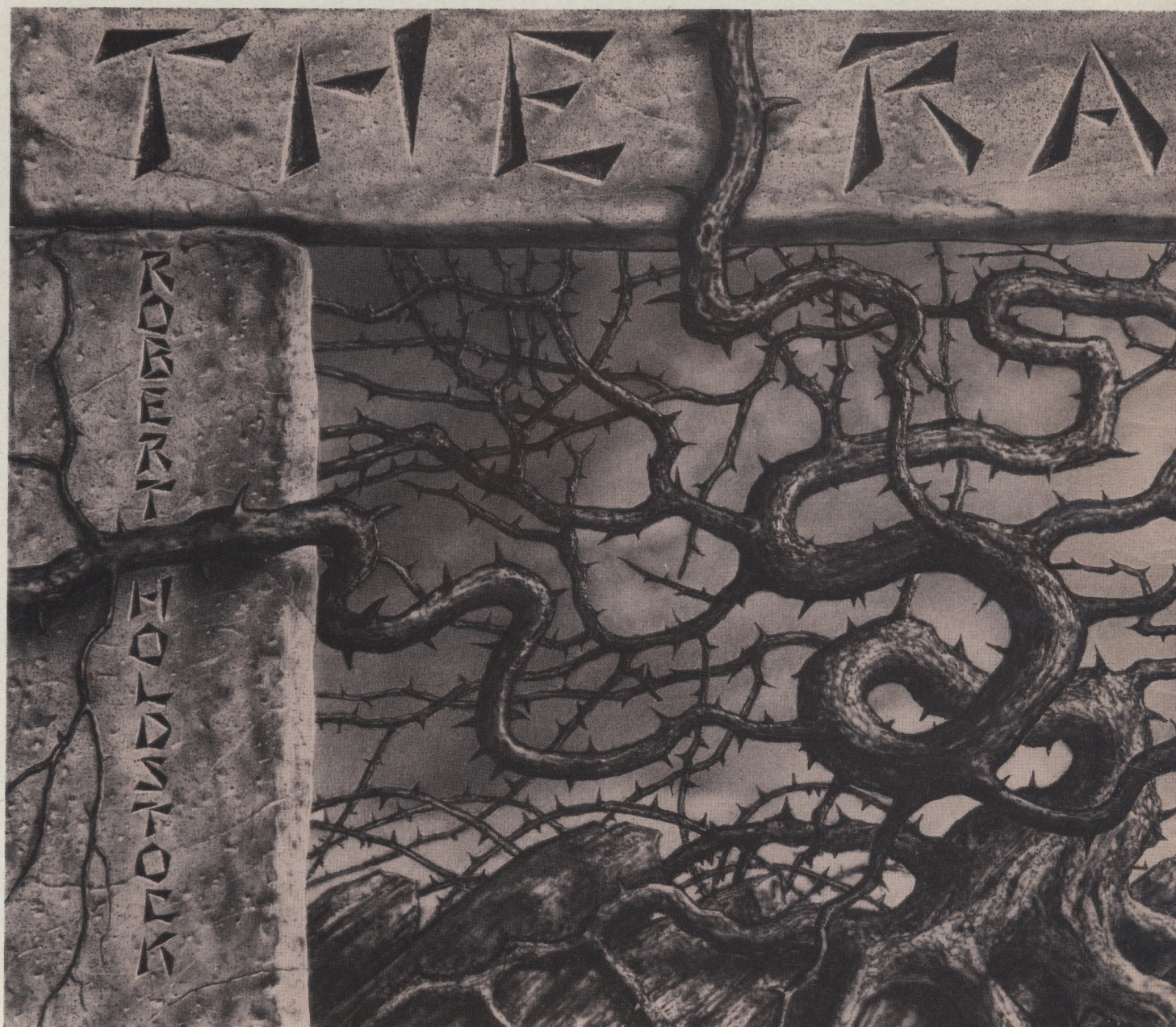
Darrell Schweitzer
(Editor, *Weird Tales*)
Philadelphia

Dear Editors:

I bought my first issue of *Interzone* in May (No. 71) and read my first *Interzone* story, "Slowly Comes a Hungry People" by William Barton, with complete disbelief. I did not believe that, outside the most repressive religions and the Neo-Nazi movement, such misogyny and homophobia was still encouraged. No matter how it is dressed up.

Anyone considering this story seriously would believe that women have no sex drive and didn't enjoy sex, that their genitals are there for male pleasure and not their own, that women made themselves a species separate from men and caused alienation between the sexes. That homosexuals are weak, deformed, effeminate caused

Continued on page 25



Quhen thow art ded and laid in layme
 And Raggtre rut thi ribbis ar
 Thow art than brocht to thi lang h  yme
 Than grett agayn warldis dignite.
 Unknown (c. 1360 AD)

September 11th, 1978

I am placing this entry at the beginning of my edited journal for reasons which will become apparent. Time is very short for me now, and there are matters which must be briefly explained. I am back at the cottage in Scarfell, the stone house in which I was born and which has always been at the centre of my life. I have been here for some years and am finally ready to do what must be done. Edward Pottifer is with me – good God-fearing man that he is – and it will be he who closes this journal and he alone who will decide upon its fate.

The moment is very close. I have acquired a set of dental pincers with which to perform the final part of the ritual. Pottifer has seen into my mouth – an experience which clearly disturbed him, no doubt

because of its intimacy – and he knows which teeth to pull and which to leave. After the inspection he muttered that he is more used to pulling rose-thorns from fingers than molars from jaws. He asked me if he might keep the teeth as souvenirs and I said he could, but he should look after them carefully.

I cannot pretend that I am not frightened. I have edited my life's journal severely. I have taken out all that does not relate forcefully to my discovery. Many journeys to foreign parts have gone, and many accounts of irrelevant discovery and strange encounters. Since these might give some future researcher a clue as to why this thing has happened – and to guide my hand and eye – I shall not destroy those sheets. I shall hide them. Not even Pottifer will know where they are. I leave for immediate posterity only this bare account in Pottifer's creased and soil-engrined hands.

Judge my work by this account, or judge my sanity. When this deed is done I shall be certain of one thing: that in whatever form I shall have become, I will be beyond judgement. I shall walk away, leaving all behind, and not look back.



Time has been kinder to Scarfell Cottage than perhaps it deserves. It has been, for much of its existence, an abandoned place, a neglected shrine. When I finally came back to it, years after my mother's death, its wood had rotted, its interior decoration had decayed, but its thick cob walls – two feet of good Yorkshire stone – had proved too strong for the ferocious northern winters. The house had been renovated with difficulty, but the precious stone lintel over the doorway – the beginning of my quest – was thankfully intact and undamaged. The house of my childhood became habitable again, twenty years after I left it.

From the tiny study where I write, the view into Scardale is as eerie and entrancing as it ever was. The valley is a sinuous, silent place, its steep slopes broken by monolithic black rocks and stunted trees that grow from the green at sharp, windshaped angles. There are no inhabited dwellings here, no fields. The only movement is the grey flow of cloud shadow and the flash of sunlight on the thin stream. In the far distance, remote at the end of the valley, the tower

of a church: a place for which I have no use.

And of course – all this is seen through the branches of the tree. The raghthorn. The terrible tree.

It grows fast. Each day it seems to strain from the earth, stretching an inch or two into the storm skies, struggling for life. Its roots have spread further across the grounds around the cottage and taken a firmer grip upon the drystone wall at the garden's end; to this it seems to clasp as it teeters over the steep drop to the dale. There is such menace in its aspect, as if it is stretching its hard knotty form, ready to snatch at any passing life.

It guards the entrance to the valley. It is a rare tree, neither hawthorn nor blackthorn, but some ancient form of plant life, with a history more exotic than the Glastonbury thorn. Even its roots have thorns upon them. The roots themselves spread below the ground like those of a wild rose, throwing out suckers in a circle about the twisted bole: a thousand spikes forming a palisade around the trunk and thrusting inches above the earth. I have seen no bird try to feed upon the tiny berries which it produces in mid-winter. In

the summer its bark has a terrible smell. To go close to the tree induces dizziness. Its thorns, when broken, curl up after a few minutes, like tiny live creatures.

How I hated that tree as a child. How my mother hated it! We were only stopped from destroying it by the enormity of the task, since such had been tried before and it was found that every single piece of root had to be removed from the ground to prevent it growing again. And soon after leaving Scarfell Cottage as a young man, I became glad of the tree's defensive nature – I began to long to see the thorn again.

To begin with however, it was the stone lintel that fascinated me: the strange slab over the doorway, with its faint alien markings. I first traced those markings when I was ten years old and imagined that I could discern letters among the symbols. When I was seventeen and returned to the cottage from boarding school for a holiday, I realized for the first time that they were cuneiform, the wedge-shaped characters that depict the ancient languages of Sumeria and Babylon.

I tried to translate them, but of course failed. It certainly occurred to me to approach the British Museum – after all my great uncle Alexander had worked at that noble institution for many years – but those were full days and I was an impatient youth. My study was demanding. I was to be an archaeologist, following in the family tradition, and no doubt I imagined there would be time enough in the future to discover the meaning of the Sumerian script.

At that time all I knew of my ancestor, William Alexander, was that he was a great uncle, on my father's side, who had built the cottage in the dales in 1880, immediately on his return from the Middle East. Although the details of what he had been doing in the Bible lands were obscure, I knew he had spent many years there, and also that he had been shot in the back during an Arab uprising: a wound he survived.

There is a story which my mother told me, handed down through two generations. The details are smudged by the retelling, but it relates how William Alexander came to Scarfell, leading a great black-and-white Shire horse hauling a brewer's dray. On the dray were the stones with which he would begin to build Scarfell Cottage, on land he had acquired. He walked straight through the village with not a word to a soul, led the horse and cart slowly up the steep hill to the valley edge, took a spade, dug a pit and filled it with dry wood. He set light to the wood and kept the fire going for four days. In all that time he remained in the open, either staring out across the valley or tending the fire. He didn't eat. He didn't drink. There was no tree there at the time. When at last the fire died down he paid every man in the village a few shillings to help with the building of a small stone cottage. And one of the stones to be set – he told them – was a family tombstone whose faded letters could still be seen on its faces. This was placed as the lintel to the door.

Tombstone indeed! It was a stolen stone of great archaeological value. A stone whose theft might have marked the end of his career – yes, in that way perhaps it was a tombstone. But the letters on that grey-faced obelisk had been marked there four thousand years before, and had a value beyond measure.

Lashed to the deck of a cargo vessel, carried across the Mediterranean, through the straits of Gibraltar, the Bay of Biscay, the obelisk had arrived in England (coincidentally) at the time Cleopatra's Needle was expected. The confused Customs Officers had waved it through, believing it to be a companion piece to the much larger Egyptian obelisk.

This then is all I need to say, save to add that three years after the building of the cottage the locals noticed a tree of unfamiliar shape growing from the pit where the fire had burned that night. The growth of the tree had been phenomenally fast; it had appeared in the few short months of one winter.

The rest of the account is extracted from my journal. It will explain the reasons for my perilous undertaking. Judge me upon it. Judge my sanity. Judge whether I remain in the mortal realm. There are many questions to which there seem no answers. Who, or what, guided me to previously hidden information during the years? My uncle's ghost perhaps? The ghost of something considerably more ancient? Or even the spirit of the tree itself, though what would be its motive? There are too many coincidences for there not to have been some divine, some spiritual presence at work. But who? And perhaps the answer is: no person at all, rather a force of destiny for which we have no words in our language.

August 7th, 1958

I have been at Tel Enkish for four days now, frustrated by Professor Legmeshu's refusal to allow me onto the site of the excavation. It is clear however, that a truly astonishing discovery is emerging.

Tel Enkish seems to be the site of an early Sumerian temple to a four-part god, or man-god, with many of the attributes of Gilgamesh. From the small town of Miktah, a mile away, little can be seen but a permanent dust cloud over the low dry hills, and the steady stream of battered trucks and carts that plough back and forth between the dump site and the excavation itself. All the signs are that there is something very big going on. Iraqi officials are here in number. Also the children of the region have flocked to Tel Enkish from miles around the site. They beg, they pester, they demand work on what is now known as "The Great Tomb". They are unaware that as a visitor I have no authority myself.

August 9th, 1958

Unbelievable! Frightening! Humbling! These words encapsulate everything I feel, everything I have heard and seen today. I have at last been to the site. I have seen the shrine which William Alexander uncovered eighty years ago. I have never in my life been so affected by the presence of the monumental past in the corroded ruins of the present.

My frantic messages were at last acknowledged, this morning at eight. Legmeshu, it seems, has only just made the connection between me and William Alexander. At midday, a dustcovered British Wooley came for me. The middle-aged woman who drove it turned out to be Legmeshu's American wife. She refused to take me to the site until she was quite certain I was indeed a relative of William Alexander. Then she asked me, "Have you brought the stone?" and looked around my small room as if I might have

been hiding it below the wardrobe or something. She was angry when I explained that I had brought only my transcription of the glyphs on the weathered rock. She quizzed me as to where the stone was now located, and I refused to answer.

"Come with me," she snapped, and led the way to the car. We drove through the jostling crowds in silence. Over the nearest rise we passed through barbed-wire fencing and check points not unlike those to be found in army camps. Iraqi guards peered into the vehicle, but on seeing Dr Legmeshu, waved us on. There was a sense of great agitation in the air. Everyone seemed tense and excited.

The site itself is in a crater of the tel, the mound on which the temple had been built and over which later generations of buildings in mud had been added. In the fashion of the notorious archaeologist, Woolley, the top layer of the tel had been blasted away to expose the remains of the civilization which had flourished there in the third millennium BC. It had not been Legmeshu who had been so destructive, but my ancestor, Alexander.

As I feasted my eyes on the beautifully preserved building, Dr Legmeshu waited impatiently. She told me that the temple was from the period associated with Gilgamesh the King. It was made of refined mud-brick, and had been covered with a weatherproof skin of burnt brick set in bitumen.

"Where had the Alexander stone been set?" I asked, and she pointed to the centre of the ruins. "They had created a megalith structure at the very heart of the temple. The stone which your relative stole was the keystone. This is why you must return it. We cannot allow..." She broke off and looked at me angrily. If she had been about to make a threat, she had thought better of it.

Her attitude led me to expect the worst from the male Dr Legmeshu, but I am delighted to say that he could not have been more charming. He is a young-looking man, his skin very dark, his eyes alert. He is tall and stooped, and his khakis hang on him like fluttering rags. I found him in the tent, poring over a set of inscriptions which had been traced out on paper. He was leaning on a large slab of rock and when I looked more closely I saw that it was identical to the lintel at Scarfell Cottage.

He was fascinated by the route I had taken in discovering him. The Iraqi government had made formal representation to the British government, five years before, for the return of the "Tel Enkish Stone" to its natural site. Unlike the Elgin Marbles, which the British Museum regarded as their right to keep safe, no official in London had ever heard of the Tel Enkish Stone.

The argument had waged within those same "scenes" for years, and had finally been taken up by the press. A picture of one of the other Tel Enkish stones had caught my attention, along with the headline: WHERE IS THE ALEXANDER STONE? Some keen reporter had obviously done his research to the point where he had made the connection.

The museum by that time had established that the stone had been removed by Professor Alexander, who they understood had retired to an unknown location after returning from the Middle East in the late 1870s. The Iraqi government believed none of this of course,

thinking that the British Museum had the stone hidden, and relations were soured between the two countries for some years afterwards.

I have told Legmeshu that the stone lies in a quarry, the location of which I shall make known to the museum on my return to the United Kingdom. He has accepted this.

The story of those events, eighty years before, is difficult to ascertain. Alexander had worked on the site with Legmeshu's own great-grandfather. The two men had been close friends, and had made the astonishing discovery of the megaliths at the heart of the mud-brick temple together. There had been eight stones arranged in a circle, standing vertically. Four stones had lain across their tops. A mini stonehenge. And in the centre, four altars, three to known gods, one... one which defied explanation.

"No trace of those altars remains," Legmeshu told me over tea. "But my great-grandfather's notes are quite clear. There were three altars to the three phases of the Hunter God: the youth, the king, the wise ancient. But to whom the fourth altar was dedicated...? he shrugged. "A goddess perhaps? Or the king reborn? My relative left only speculation."

There had been a difference of opinion during that first excavation; a fight; and a death. Apart from what I have written here, the record is blank. The only other information was in my safe keeping: a folk memory from the inhabitants of Scarfell, of an old man who led a horse and dray up the hill towards the valley overlook, of a fire that lasted four days, an ancient stone, and a tree that grew one winter – a black and evil-looking thorn.

Legmeshu snatched my copy of the Scarfell inscription. He ran his eyes over the signs, the cuneiform script that seemed as familiar to him as was my own alphabet to me. "This is not all of it," he said after a long while. I had realized some time before that the fourth surface of the stone, flush with the brickwork between door and ceiling, had characters on it like the other three. They could not be read of course without demolishing the cottage, which I had not been prepared to do at the time. I told Legmeshu that the fourth side had been exposed over a long period to the toxic air of a northern English factory town and the characters had been all but erased.

He seemed beside himself with fury for a moment. "What a destructive and stupid thing to do, to leave the stone in such a place. It must be returned! It must be rescued!"

"Of course," I said. "I intend to do so on my return to England. I have only just located the stone myself, after years of studying my great uncle's notes..."

He seemed mollified by this. I have no intention of giving up the whereabouts of the stone however. I lie without shame. I feel obsessively protective towards the stone... towards the cottage, and yes, in my adulthood, towards the tree. Somehow they are linked through my great uncle and to remove or destroy any one of them would be like smashing the Rosetta Stone with a sledge hammer.

Legmeshu seemed to come to a sudden decision, saying, "Follow me," and led me down to the site itself. We came at last to the wide tarpaulin that covered the centre of the temple. This was the heart of the place of worship.

It was an area of mystical energy. I could sense the presence of invisible power. It had an immediate and lasting effect on me. I began to shake. Even as I write – hours after the experience – my hand is unsteady. As I stood there I was in the far past. Fingers of time brushed through my hair; the breath of the dead blew gently against my face. Sounds, smells, touches ... and an overwhelming, awe-inspiring presence – silently watching me.

Legmeshu seemed entirely unaware of these things.

His voice brought me back to the present. He was pointing to the small concrete markers that now showed where the stones had stood, in a circle about twenty feet in diameter. On the floor, clearly outlined in the dry mud, were the twisting impressions of roots.

"It was open to the sky," Legmeshu said. "In the centre of the stones a tree had been grown, quite a large tree by the looks of it. The four altars were orientated east-west. We think there may have been a mud-filled pit below the trunk of the tree, to support its growth."

"And the purpose of the place?" I asked. Legmeshu smiled at me and passed me a small book. I opened it and saw that he had written out the translations from each stone. The partial content of the Alexander Stone had just been added and I studied the stilted English. Almost immediately I was aware of what I was reading.

Legmeshu's breathless, "It includes much of the original epic that has been lost, and earlier forms of the rest. It is a momentous find!" was quite unnecessary. I was lost in words:

And behold the waters of the Flood were gone. The mud covered the land as a cloak which stifles. Gilgamesh waited on a hill and saw Utnapishtim, Boatman of the Flood, rise from the plain of mud and beckon. "Gilgamesh, I shall reveal to you a secret thing, a mystery of the gods. Hark my words. There is a tree that grows under the water, under the mud. It has a thorn prick, a rose blade on every twig. It will wound your hands, but if you can grasp it then you will be holding that which can restore youth to a man. Its name is Old Man Who Would Be Young." "How deep is the mud?" Lord Gilgamesh asked. "Seven days and seven nights," answered the Boatman, and Gilgamesh drew breath and swam into the blackness.

When he had cut Old Man Who Would Be Young he swam again to the surface of the mud. Utnapishtim sent a woman with golden tresses to clean and anoint the body of the kingly man. And Gilgamesh possessed her for seven days and seven nights in a fury of triumph, and not for one moment did he let go of Old Man Who Would Be Young. And when the child was born, Utnapishtim gave it at once to Old Man Who Would Be Young, so that the first berry appeared on the branches. "Now it will grow," the Boatman said. "And I have told you of the temple you must build and the manner of anointing the flesh."

Now Gilgamesh departed for high-walled Uruk, and when the thorns of Old Man Who Would Be Young pricked his thumbs he was increased of power. And he denied all the old men their touch of the tree, so that their youth was denied them. But when the time came, Gilgamesh alone would place Old Man Who Would Be Young in the proper way, and lie with it in an embrace of seven days and seven nights.

Here then, carved in stone, was a version of the immortality tale of The Epic of Gilgamesh that was quite unlike the story from the clay tablets. And it was an earlier version, Legmeshu was quite adamant. I was familiar with the great story, which to many was the first story of the mythological cycle that would soon sweep the world: of Gilgamesh the King, half man, half god, of his battles with giants; his quests through the great forest of cedar for his lost friend Enkidu; of his search for eternal youth, the jealously guarded secret of the gods themselves.

And here was a cruder form, with hints of the magic ritual that the later version appears to have lost.

"The stone came from Egypt," Legmeshu said. "This place functioned as a ritual site of enormous importance for perhaps two hundred years. The secret plant seems to have been a thorn, which would account for the pattern of roots on the mud there. I believe this place celebrated immortality. And the fourth altar may be representational: the risen life. So we have Youth, King, Magus, and again, Youth."

Legmeshu spoke, but his words became just sounds. He seemed more interested in archaeology than in the astonishing literary discovery. To him, legends are only part of the story of the people; they are one more tool, or one more part of the machine that is archaeology. He wants the words intact, as much as he wants the stone intact, but I realize now that he has not been affected by the meaning of the words, neither their literal interpretation nor what they imply about culture and ritual in the earliest of civilized times.

Quite clearly my great uncle did! What other reason could there have been for his dragging away of one of the stones – the key stone – and raising too, a strange and gloomy tree? Did he find the seed of a familiar thorn that in the time of Babylon was known as Old Man Who Would Be Young?

The key! It tells of the growth from fire of a tree. It tells of the child who must be given to the growing sapling. And what other salient information lies on the hidden face of the lintel, awaiting discovery?

August 10th, 1958

I can stay here no longer. I wish to return to the site at Tel Enkish but I have received word that the Iraqis are unhappy that I "own" the stone. The time has come to slip away from this country. For a while, anyway. I leave so much unfinished; I leave so many questions unanswered.

June 14th, 1965

I had almost come to believe that my supernatural encounter at Tel Enkish was no more than imagination; whimsy. The intervening years have been very barren and very frustrating. (Legmeshu has finally ceased to hound me for the stone, but I still watch my back whenever I am in the Near or Middle East). Now, something has turned up and I have flown to Cairo from Jerusalem, via Cyprus.

It began two months ago: I shall summarize the event briefly. I was in Jerusalem, initiating the project for which Cambridge has at last agreed to fund me: namely, to identify and discover the true symbolic and mythological meaning of the type of tree which provided the Crown of Thorns at Christ's execution.

(A briar wreath, a coif of knotted thistles, a halo of thorn tree twigs? From what species of shrub or tree?) The reference to the "resurrecting thorn" in the work of the unknown writer of Gilgamesh has haunted me for years. Of all the world's great resurrections, Christ's is the most famous. I am increasingly obsessed with the true manner of that raising, and the Crown of Thorns is a teasing symbol, a provocative invitation which came to me while staring at the ragthorn through the window of Scarfell Cottage.

The University Library here in Jerusalem is wonderfully varied and, if understocked with books on Christian teaching, it remains a treasurehouse of manuscripts from ancient days.

One afternoon, in the library canteen, a noisy and crowded place, I overheard a conversation.

The two men were behind me, speaking in awkward English, obviously a second language to them both. One of them was an Israeli diplomat I recognized; the other was an Arab. I guessed from the dialect of his occasional exclamations in his first language, that he was Egyptian. He looked uncomfortable and nervous: a stranger in a hostile land. Their conversation was hushed, but I could hear it quite clearly, and soon became intrigued.

The Egyptian said, "Some diving men, with the tanks on the back – not professional men – tourist. They are swim near Pharos Island, where sunk the old light warnings for ships..."

The Israeli took a moment to work out what was being said.

"Light warnings? Lighthouse. The Pharos lighthouse?"

The Egyptian said excitedly, "Yes, yes! By ancient city Alexandria. Yes. Find some very old jar. Very old. Thousands years. No sea get into jar. Papers inside. Old papers. Old before coming of Roman peoples. Many more jars in sea, so I am told."

Their voices dropped even lower and I found it hard to catch what was being said. All I could determine was that the Israeli government is interested in any scroll that relates to its own culture and such scrolls *do* exist in the new discoveries. Naturally, they are prepared to pay a great deal of money and the Egyptian was busy lining his own pockets by bringing this information to the attention of the Israeli Ministry of Culture.

The thought occurred to me immediately: might there be something in the jars that relates to the thorn?

It has been years since Tel Enkish, but once again I have a feeling of fate unfolding: of being watched by the silent past. I am convinced there is something in Cairo for me.

June 19th 1965

My contact here is Abdullah Rashid. He is well known to the professors at the University in Jerusalem and has "supplied" objects and information to them for some years.

Professor Berenstein in Jerusalem is a friend of mine and kindly arranged the surreptitious meeting with this man who is in a position to inspect and copy the contents of the jars. This morning, after "checking my credentials" Abdullah came to my hotel. Over breakfast he explained that five of the ancient jars had already been taken from the water and two of them



opened in controlled conditions. He is cagey about his knowledge of the contents, but has remarked, cryptically, that he believes there is a reference to some thorn tree among the first papers to be removed and examined.

The discovery is, as I knew, being kept under tight wraps, and Abdullah was surprised and impressed that I had managed to hear about the parchments. It is the intention of the Egyptians to translate the documents and plays themselves, and take full credit before releasing the finds to the world at large. Hence, people like Abdullah are making a great deal of money leaking facsimiles of the parchments.

This is what Abdullah has told me: the discovery so far is of several documents which survived the fire in the Library of Alexandria (the date of which is still unknown, but most likely to have been in the early years of the first millennium AD). The belief is that before the rioting crowds managed to penetrate the library, strip its shelves and set the place alight, a number of soldiers loaded saddlebags with whatever the librarians could select to save, and rode from the city to a galley, which pulled off-shore. Here, forty glazed amphorae were filled with manuscripts and sealed with wax, linen, more wax and finally corked with clay. The sealing of the documents was probably a safety measure prior to sailing to some safe location, in case the ship should sink, but for some reason the jars were thrown overboard near the lighthouse itself. Perhaps the crew suddenly found themselves in danger and unable to set sail? Nothing more is known of this. Certainly the intention would have been to recover the vessels, once the danger was past, but it must be surmised that there were no survivors who knew of the whereabouts of the jars, or even that they existed. Seawater rotted the rope nets holding them together and then currents carried some of the jars out into the Mediterranean, and stretched them in a line towards Cyprus.

June 20th, 1965

Today we saw the recovery operation at work. The shores of Alexandria are always bustling with small craft, mostly feluccas similar to that in which we serenely approached the island. We blended well, since I had dressed in local fashion. It was calm on the blue waters, but the sun bore down on us with unrelenting pressure and its effects have made me quite dizzy. We sailed to Pharos Island, to the northern point, and watched a large rusty dredger assist a team of divers in bringing up the precious artefacts.

Eventually we received our reward. We saw one of the amphorae winched from the water. It was long and slender, encrusted with limpets and barnacles, and dripped a particularly silky, dark-green weed, which hung from the bullet-blunt jar like a beard. A crab of gigantic size dangled from this furze by one claw, as if reluctant to release the treasure which had for so long been the property of the ocean.

A motor launch skimmed by, slowing to observe us, and we busied ourselves with nets and sail, meaningless but frantic activity, while Abdullah shouted harsh orders, and our two sailors pretended outrage. After a few seconds the launch gunned its engine and roared away.

I asked Abdullah where the amphora would now be

taken. He told me, "To the museum." There it would be opened in controlled conditions.

"Is there no chance I could witness the opening?"

He shook his head and laughed. He told me that only certain government ministers and professors would be there. And some technical assistants, who were highly trusted.

Again the laughter as he prodded his chest.

"People like me," he said.

Abdullah's work would be to photograph the opening of the jars, at each stage, then any contents, page by page. Facsimiles would be made from the photographs.

"These facsimiles would be for sale?"

"Not officially of course," he smiled, "but all things are negotiable, yes?"

(Abdullah knows very well what I require. He said it would take him two or three days to scan everything for my particular needs.)

June 23rd, 1965

Abdullah was here, but the news is not good. He has been unable to obtain copies yet, not just for me but for others, as he must not be caught compromising his position at the museum. He has photographed several manuscripts so far.

It is a mixed bag, apparently. There are two pieces by Plato. A play by Plautus called *Servius Pompus*, which was previously unknown. There are five Pindaric odes, two of them new. There is a copy of Euripides' *Medea* with slight variations on known copies, and twenty pages of a manuscript by Julius Caesar, entitled, *His Secret Dialogues with the Priests of Gaul on the Nature of their Magic and Rituals*.

The final piece of parchment contains an even more exquisite (it is believed) original hand: that of Homer himself. It is a fragment of his *Iliad*, and consists of half of the Death of Hector, all of the Funeral of Patroclus and a third or so of the Funeral Games. It is a manifestly ancient hand, and the Egyptians are quite convinced that it is the writing of Homer, adding weight to the argument that Homer was one man, and not a collective of writers.

All of this would be enough to excite me beyond tolerance, but Abdullah, aware of the nature of my search, has now told me something that holds me breathless in anticipation: that the *Iliad* fragment contains a reference to a "blood thorn."

That is the facsimile I want. I have told him that no matter what else he obtains, he must get that fragment of unknown Homer. My enthusiasm has no doubt put up the price of those lines of verse, but I am sure I am being skilfully teased into such a state by Abdullah. He could probably produce the goods now, but is jiggling the price up with his procrastination, pretending he is being watched too closely. I can play the game too, and have let him see me packing my suitcase, and looking anxiously at my diary.

October 1st, 1965

I am back at the cottage in Scarfell, the place of my birth. I have come here because I feel I have been summoned home. I have been at Cambridge for most of the summer, but the voice of something dark, something omnipresent, has called me here...home to the cottage, to the wild valley, to the tree.

I have translated much that Abdullah was able to sell me. The documents make fascinating reading.

The play by Titus Maccius Plautus is hilarious. Plautus lived about the year 200 BC and we have 21 of his extant plays: we now have 22. Servius Pompus is completely typical, dealing with a common legionary in Fabius' army who is convinced he is of noble birth, and treats his comrades like dirt. His ultimate discovery that he is slave-born earns him a permanent position: on a cart, collecting the dung left behind by Hannibal's elephants.

The fragment of Caesar is most atypical however and very strange. It seems to have been written in the weeks prior to his assassination, when already the auguries were warning him of the event to come. Depressed by a heavy sense of fatalism, he re-explored his interrogations (which he called "conversations") with captured Gallic Druids and soothsayers. The 20 manuscript pages are rich and detailed with the legendary and magic matter of the Celtic inhabitants of Europe, and there is a fascinating revelation concerning the coded language that existed within the arrangement of the stones on the landscape.

All that is for another paper. It is the Homeric verse that excites me, for in this fragment of the epic cycle of the Greeks on the shores of Asia Minor there is a reference to the resurrection that confirms me in two beliefs: that there has been a deliberate effort to obliterate this knowledge from the world, and that someone – or some thing – is guiding my search to build again that knowledge from the clues I am gradually discovering.

The autumn day is dark as I write this, with huge columns of thunderous cloud drifting over Scarfell from the west. I am working by lamplight. I am chilled to the bone. The great rugged face of the fell surrounds me, and the solitary thorn – black against the darkness – seems to lean towards me through the small leaded windows that show its sinister form. That tree has known eternity. I sense now, that it has seen me learn of Achilles, and his unsure use of the ancient magic.

Here then, is my crude translation of the passage of the *Iliad* that is relevant. It is from the "Funeral of Patroclus," Achilles' great friend. While Achilles sulked in his tent, during the siege of Troy, Patroclus donned the man's armour and fought in his place, only to be killed by the Trojan hero, Hector. Achilles, in his grief, then returned to the battle, but not before the honouring of his dead friend by the building of a great pyre and monument. After the body had been burned, and the fire cooled...

...then they gathered the noble dust of their
comrade
And with ashes from the fire filled a golden vase.
And the vase was double-sealed with fat
Then placed reverently in the hut of the gallant
Patroclus,
And those who saw it there laid soft linens
Over the gold tomb, as a mark of respect.
Now the divine Achilles fashioned the barrow for
his friend.
A ring of stone was laid upon the earth of the shore
And clear spring water was sprinkled amongst the
stones.

Then rich dark soil was carried from the fields and
piled upon the stones.
Until it was higher than the storm-soaked cedar.
Prince Achilles walked about the barrow of
Patroclus
And wept upon the fertile ground which held his
friend
While Nestor, son of Neleus, was sent a Dream
from Heaven.
The Dream Messenger came from Zeus, the
Cloud-compeller
Whose words reached the ears of the excellent
Achilles
Who pulled the blood thorn from the wall of Troy
And placed the thorn tree on the tear-soaked
mound.
In its branches he placed the sword and shield of
Patroclus
And in so doing pierced his own flesh with the
Thorn,
Offering life-blood as his blood for life.

Here the fragment returns to the story content as we know it: the funeral games for Patroclus and the final reckoning between Achilles and the Trojan champion, Hector. My translation leaves a great deal to be desired. The metre of Homer's verse in the original seems very crude, not at all as we have become used to it, and perhaps later generations than Homer have "cleaned up" the old man's act, as it were. But there is power in the words, and an odd obsession with "earth." When Homer wrote them, I am sure he was powered by the magic of Zeus, a magic which Achilles had attempted to invoke.

Poor Achilles. I believe I understand his error. The whole ritual of the burial, of course, was intended to bring Patroclus back to life!

His mistake was in following the normal Mycenaean custom of burning the body of his friend upon the pyre. Patroclus never rose again. He couldn't. It is apparent to me that Zeus tried to warn him not to follow custom, not to place the body of his friend upon the burning faggots, because several lines previously (as the body of Patroclus was laid upon the pyre), Homer had written:

Now in the honouring of Patroclus there was
unkind delay,
No fire would take upon the wood below the hero.
Then the excellent Achilles walked about the pyre
and mourned anew
But through his grief-eyes he saw the answer to the
fire
And raised his arms and prayed to all the winds
And offered splendid sacrifice to the two gods
Boreas from the North and Zephyr of the Western
Gale.
He made them rich libations from a golden cup
And implored them blow among the kindling
So that the honouring fire might grow in strength
And honoured ash be made of brave Patroclus.

No fire would take, and Achilles failed to see the chance that his god was offering him. Zeus was keeping the wind from the flames, but seeing his warnings go unheeded, turned away from Achilles in a passing pique.

Nothing else in this fragment seems to relate to the subject of the thorn, or its means of operation. Abdullah has promised to send me more material when and if he can, but since nothing has arrived for several months, already I suspect that the knowledge of the lost amphorae and their precious contents is being suppressed.

What can I learn from Homer? That there was a genuine belief in the power of the *thorn* to raise the dead? That some "pricking of the flesh" is important? Achilles pricks his arm: his blood for life. But this is not the only life hinted at in the two references I have so far found: a child was given to the tree, according to the Gilgamesh fragment.

I feel the darkness closing in.

March 11th, 1970

The stone lintel is *bound* to the tree! Bonded to it. Tied! It is a frightening thought. This morning I tried to dislodge the stone from its position, scraping at the cement which binds it to the rest of the coarse stone of the cottage. I discovered that the ragthorn's roots are *in the house itself*! It is clear to me now that my great uncle had a far better understanding of the importance of the tree and stone than I have so far imagined. Why did he drag back the Gilgamesh stone to England? Why did he embed it in the way he did: as part of a door, part of a house? Is the "doorway" symbolic? A divide through which one passes from one world to another? Obviously the hidden side of the lintel contains words of great importance, words which he decided had to be concealed from the curious eyes of his contemporaries.

The stone is not a tomb's marker, it is the tomb itself: the tomb of lost knowledge!

All this has occurred to me recently and this morning I began to extract the lintel from its resting place. I used proper tools and a great deal of brute strength. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that I was scraping through *plant tissue*! A thorny root stabbed out at me, then hung there, quivering and slowly curling. It has frightened me deeply. The whole lintel is covered and protected – on its hidden face – by an extension from the ragthorn that grows at the end of the garden, a menacing and evil presence. I could sever the root to the cottage, but I feel a chill of fear on each occasion that I ponder this possibility. Even now, as I write, I feel I am drawing a terrible darkness closer.

The tree has come to inhabit the house itself. There is a thick tendril of dark root running along the wall in the kitchen. The chimney stack is webbed with tree roots. I lifted a floorboard and a thin tendril of the ragthorn jerked away from the sudden light. The floor is covered with tiny feelers.

Webbed in tree. And all centring on the stone lintel, the ancient monolith. I wonder, now, whether there are any signs, any words to be found upon that hidden face. The thought occurs to me that the tree has fed upon them, sucking the magic from the stone, consuming them, growing strong from the lost knowledge that they once contained.

No wonder I feel watched. Was it my uncle's doing? Or was he merely obeying the instructions of a more sinister authority?

September 22nd, 1970

I have received a message from the British Museum, forwarded from my rooms in Cambridge by my research assistant, David Wilkins. He alone knows where I live. He is an able student, a keen researcher, and I have confided in him to a considerable degree. On my behalf he is searching the dusty archives of Cambridge for other references to the "ragthorn" or to resurrection. I am convinced that many such references must exist, and that it is a part of my new purpose to elicit them, and to use them.

"Has the museum any record of William Alexander, or any knowledge of the whereabouts of his papers?" I had asked in 1967, without result.

The new letter reads quite simply thus: "We have remembered your earlier enquiry concerning the effects, records, papers and letters of William Alexander and are pleased to inform you that a small string-bound, wax-sealed file has been discovered, a fragment of his known effects which has clearly been overlooked during the process of reinstatement of said effects to the rightful owner. We would be most pleased to offer you the opportunity to break the seal on this file, and to review the contents, prior to discussing a mutually suitable arrangement for their final disposal."

September 25th, 1970

I wonder, now, whether or not William Alexander *intended* this file to be discovered. I would like to think that in his ageing bones, he felt someone coming behind, a soul-mate, a follower, who would become as entranced with his work as he was himself. Considering what I believe now, however, I think it more likely that he intended, at some time in the future, to recover the file in person, perhaps *after* most people believed him gone.

Today I have spoken to my great uncle. Or rather... he has spoken to me. He is as close to me now, as I sit here in my room in the Bonnington Hotel writing these notes, as close to me as if he were here in person. He has left a fragment of his work, a teasing, thrilling fragment.

What did he do with the rest of his papers I wonder?

The man was born in 1832. There is no record of his death. The year is 1970. It is autumn. I tremble to think of this, but I wonder if a man, born before the reign of Victoria had begun, is still walking abroad, still soaking up the rain and the wind and the sun of the England that birthed him, or of the Bible Lands that so captured his heart.

This is a summary then, of the day's events and discoveries:

This morning I entered the labyrinthine heart of the British Museum: those deep dark corridors and rooms that have been burrowed into the bruised London clay below the building. I was conducted to a small book-lined room, heavy with history, heady with the smell of parchment and manuscript. A man of sober demeanour and middle age received us. He had been working under a single pool of desk lamplight, imprisoned by it like some frugal monk, translating a faded parchment letter written in the year 486 AD or thereabouts by a mercenary British chieftain, and making reference to the "hoarded treasure of the legions, consigned below the Hill of Badonicus."

On my arrival he favoured me with room lighting, so that his desk was no longer a captive of the lamp. He was, despite his dour looks, a cheerful soul, and was as delighted by his discovery of William Alexander as I would become of my discovery of his remaining notes. Alexander, it seems, was an old rogue. He had a formidable reputation. He was known as an eccentric man, of extravagant tastes, and frontiersman's manners. He had shocked the denizens of the 19th-century archaeological establishment with his rough Yorkshire speech and his outlandish manners. If it were not for the fact that he produced priceless historical artefacts from lands closed to most Europeans, he might have been ostracized by society from the outset.

His purloining of the weighty monolith from Tel Enkish – whilst not to be applauded – can nevertheless be admired for the sheer audacity and logistic difficulties overcome.

He had, it seemed, collected his papers and belongings from his private offices in the deep recesses of the museum, on the 15th March, 1878. His departure had been quite typical of the man. He had placed his files and books upon a handcart and hauled it, clattering, up the levels, dragging it through the reading room disturbing everyone present, through the wide foyer, and out into the day, having caused more than one jowl in the establishment to quiver with indignation. He used to tell my mother, with a hearty chuckle, that if the Victorians were good at one thing, it was displaying indignation.

On passing the Chief Curator, who was wishing him "au revoir" on the steps outside, he reached into a bag, drew out an alabaster vase of exquisite design, and passed it over. When opened, within the neck of the previously sealed vase was a perfectly preserved red rose, its scent a fleeting moment of an ancient summer day, instantly lost as the flower became dust.

"It's from the tomb of a Boy King," he told the astonished farewell group. "There was nothing to interest me, but I've given one of your bright young men some clues. He ought to find it in about 40 years, if he's worth his salt."

And with that, he left. And apparently when that "eager young man" – by that time Lord Carnavon – opened Tutankhamen's tomb, there was a widespread rumour that the words "What took you so long?" were scrawled in the dust of the main burial chamber.

Not on the cart that day, however, were 30 sheets of paper, loosely bound between two stiff pieces of cardboard (marked with his initials) and tied with string. He had placed a red wax seal across each of the four edges of the sheaf. On being handed the package, I slit the seals and cut through the formidable string knot with my penknife: shades of an Alexander who had lived long before William.

Most of the sheets in the folio are blank. I shall summarise the puzzling content of the rest.

Sheet 21. This consists of the single word: REVELATION!

Sheet 22. This is written in a more precise hand, but clearly William Alexander's. It reads: "The Bard too! The knowledge passed down as far as ELZBTH 1st. Who censored it? Who changed the



text? Two references are clear, but there must be more. There must be. Too sweet a myth for WS to ignore. P----- has discovered lost folio, but spirited it away.

(Two sheets covered with numbers and letters: a code of some sort?)

Sheet 25. This is headed *The Dream of the Rood*. It is one of two sheets that clearly relates to the "thorn" and "resurrection." The margin of this sheet is peppered with words from the Anglo-Saxon language, but the main body of Alexander's text reads like this: "Sigebeam. This means Victory tree? The runic character "thorn" is used more prolifically in the alliterative half-lines than seems usual around this point in the poem's body. Then the word *swefna*: "of dreams." Then there are the words *sylicre treow*: "wonderful tree." This phrase is enclosed by the rune "thorn." A dream tree, a tree of victory (victory over death?) surrounded and protected by thorns.

"Yes. *The tree of everlasting life*. The tree is the rood of course, the symbol of Christ's cross. But surely "tree" is meant in another sense too? A literal sense. Then, to confirm this, the phrase in the poem "adorned with coverings." Perhaps this means more than it says? Perhaps strips of material? Rags?

"I am certain that the message here is the rag-thorn tree."

This is the only note on *The Dream of the Rood* in my great uncle's file, but it proves that some (albeit cryptic) references to the ragthorn remain extant, since this text can be read in any school edition of the poem.

It is clear that an abiding and darker myth concerning the return to life of a soul "buried beneath a tree" has been imposed upon the Christianity of the author (who probably wrote the rood in the 8th century). But was the ragthorn at that time a tangible shrub that could be plucked, planted and left to resurrect the corpse of the thane or lord buried below? Or was it already a myth by that time in Old England?

The last sheet contains two fascinating pieces of Middle English poetry, dating from the late 1300s, I would think, as one of them is the last stanza of Chaucer's famous poem *The House of Fame*, believed to be unfinished. It is clear that the poem was completed, but the last few lines removed, either by Chaucer himself, or by orders of his patron.

Alexander, who must have discovered the parchment, though it is not part of his file, had this to say.

"It is Chaucer's script, no doubt about it. The parchment page is faded, the ink has spread, but I am certain this is the original. Other editions omit the final four lines. Here they are, following the known ending:

Atte laste y saugh a man,
Which that y (nevene) nat ne kan
But he seemed for to be
A man of gret auctorite ... (here the known MS ends)
Loo! how straungely spak thys wyght
How ragethorn trees sal sithe the night,
How deeth sal fro the body slynke
When down besyde the rote it synke.

To put those last few lines into more familiar language: Lo, this man spoke of strange things, of ragthorn trees scything away the darkness and how death will creep away from the body if it is buried beneath the ragthorn's roots.

Finally, a single stanza from an English Religious Lyric, which my uncle found at the same time:

Upon thys mount I fand a tree
Wat gif agayne my soule to me!
Wen erthe toc erthe of mortal note
And ssulen wormes feste in thi throte
My nayle-stanged soule will sterte upriss
On ssulen wormes and erthe to piss.

(On this hill I discovered a tree
which gave me back my [mortal] self –
While the world might take note of mortality
And the worms eat your tender throat,
My thorn-pierced body will rise up
To treat the worms and the world with contempt.)

This then, concludes my listing of the sheets bound into what I shall call *The Alexander Folio*. How much further in his quest my great uncle managed to journey is hard to know, but he certainly discovered more than have I. What fire must have burned within him. What a fever of discovery! What fear, perhaps... what astonishment.

How death shall from the body slink when down beside the root it sinks...

That tree. That terrifying tree. It is the route to and from the Underworld for a man who is reluctant to die, who wishes to remain... *immortal*.

October 13th, 1971

I am being directed or drawn, towards new discoveries. Is it my great uncle? Or the tree? If it is William Alexander, then he must be dead, for the spirit of a living man would not work in this way. It is only spirits that have been freed from mortality that can guide the living.

This leaves me wondering about whether Alexander attempted immortality – and failed.

I suspect that if I searched the grounds of Scarfell cottage, carefully, or dug below the walls, into the space below the tree, I believe I would find his bones. Is he here, urging me to finish what he could not, whispering to me: do it right, do it right? Or... am I influenced by something else, some other spiritual presence?

I can only conclude that if not he, then the ragthorn is my guide. This would beg the question: why? Why would the thorn wish me to find the clues to its secret power over life and death, its unnatural, no *supernatural*, force? Unless – and my heart races at the thought – unless *I am its chosen disciple!* Gilgamesh was chosen. No doubt others after him, with Alexander, the last. It is possible to fail. Of course it is possible to fail. But I intend to understand, thoroughly, what is expected of me, and succeed where Alexander did not.

A low mist, thick and blunt-nosed, winds through the valley like a soft sentient beast, sniffing amongst the mosses and rocks and leaving damp crags and stunted hawthorns dripping with moisture. Its

restlessness finds its way into my spirit. I find writing difficult. There is a feeling on the land of a permanent, mist-ridden dusk. I pace the house, constantly going outside to stare at the ragthorn, perched like some black-armoured mythical bird upon the crumbling drystone wall.

Even inside the house, my eyes continually stray to the lintel, to the forgotten truth the tree holds in its tendrilous grasp. My work lies scattered around the house. I am possessed by a desire to leave the place. But I cannot. I have not heard from Wilkins for months. It is a year since I have opened the Alexander folio. Something must happen soon. Something must happen.

April 10th, 1972

The tree has grown. For the first time in years the ragthorn shows signs of growth, twig tips extending, roots inching further across the garden. It is coming into bud, and it seems to shake, even when there are no winds. At night I can hear the roots moving below the house, entwining deeper with the stone.

September 17th, 1972

An odd fragment has come to light as I worked in Cambridge, searching for the Shakespearean folio owned and hidden by Lionel Pervis (the P----- of the Alexander folio), who I have discovered was my uncle's contemporary. The fragment is a further piece of Middle English, perhaps once part of a collection of Sacred Songs. This fragment, a faded vellum sheet pressed between the pages of a copy of the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, may once have belonged to Milton himself. Certainly, this edition of his book has annotations in his own hand, still clear despite his blindness. One is tempted to wonder whether the dying man was clutching at a truth whose greatness had only been hinted at. He had perhaps discovered this obscure and frightening stanza from a hymn and kept it as an odd symbol of hope and resurrection.

Quhen thow art ded and laid in layme
And Raggtre rut this ribbis ar
Thow art than brocht to thi lang hayme
Than grett agayn warldis dignite.

When you are dead and buried in lime
And the roots of the Ragthorn form your ribs
You will then be brought back to your home
To greet the world again with dignity.

November 22nd, 1974

I have at last found a fragment of the lost folio of *Hamlet*, but not from my searches at Cambridge! It was here all the time, in the Alexander papers. One of the apparently blank sheets is not blank at all. I would not have discovered the fact but for a coincidence of dropping the sheets onto the floor and gathering them by the dim light of the hurricane lamp. The shadowy signs of word-impressions caught my attention immediately. The marks were shallow, the merest denting of the heavy paper from the rapidly scrawled writing on the now-lost top sheet. But the impressions were enough for me to use a fine powder of lead, and a wash of light oil, to bring out the words fully.

Clearly, Alexander was privileged to hear the relevant passage from *Hamlet*, from the original prompt copy of the play, and wrote them down. Lionel Pervis would not part with the whole folio itself, and perhaps it is now destroyed.

(Even as I write these words I feel apprehensive. I am certain, those years ago, that I carefully examined these blank sheets and found nothing. I know I tested for secret ink. I know that. I would surely have noticed signs of over-writing.)

The fragment of *Hamlet* makes fascinating reading, and tells me much about the method: the actual means by which the process of burial and rebirth must be achieved.

Here is Alexander's account of the discovery, and his copy of the scene that some hand, later, had eliminated from the version(s) of Shakespeare's play that has come down to us:

Pervis is a difficult man to talk to. His career is in ruins and he is an embittered man. He has confirmed certain thoughts, however. Added valuable insight. In summary: It is rightly supposed that the most reliable text of *Hamlet* is to be found in the *Second Quarto*. However, no editor would dismiss entirely the *First Folio*, though scholars have proved that the copy used by the printers for the *First Folio* was derived from a corrupt copy of the Globe Theatre prompt-book.

Pervis' brother is a barrister of repute, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Was present during the discovery of a hidden room in the cellars of his firm's building, which had been walled up and forgotten. A mountain of documents was discovered in that room, among them several pages of a manuscript of great interest to Shakespearean scholars. Pervis (the barrister) sent these to his brother, in order for the Shakespearean actor to assess their worth in academic terms and asked what monetary value they might have. Pervis (the actor) claimed never to have received the papers and was taken to court by his brother and though he could not be convicted on the evidence, he was widely believed to have stolen the manuscript. It ruined his life and his career.

Pervis later claimed to have been "given" a copy of the manuscript, though it is fairly certain he sold the original to a private collector who will have it now, in some safe in Zurich. Pervis would not release the copy to anyone, but insisted that the new version must first be heard from him, playing Hamlet's ghost at the Old Vic. Victorian society was scandalized and he was refused. Then demands were made upon him, which sent him into retreat, somewhere in Wales. It was there I managed to track him down. He was by that time a bitter old man. He knew of me, of my reputation for scandalizing the society that he believed had dealt him meanly, and with a certain amount of gold was persuaded to part with lines of the text, including reference to the burial place of Hamlet's father, beneath the roots of an exotic thorn tree.

From Act I, Scene V)

Ghost: Thus was I sleeping by a brother's hand,
Of life, of crown, of queen at once
dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousled, disappointed, unaneled,
No reck'ning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.
Aye, quarters to the four winds pointed
right
Below the 'bracing ragthorne's needled
limbs,

Yet by ironic touch my flesh immured,
 Base metal traitoring this but perfect tomb.
 O, horrible! O, horrible! Most horrible!
 If thou has nature in thee bear it not,
 Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
 A couch for luxury and damned incest...
 But howsoever thou pursues this act,
 Taint not thy mind, nor let they soul
 contrive

Against thy mother aught – leave her to
 heaven,

And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
 To prick and sting her.

Fare thee well at once,
 The glow-worm shows the matin to be near
 And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire,
 To where my bones lie compassed.

Thus to thee
 Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me.
 (The ghost vanishes)

I have read this speech 50 times now, and still the words thrill me. Since William Alexander had seen this verse, he must surely have seen the clear indications of method, the method of burial beneath the ragthorn's "root vault."

"Quarters to the four winds pointed right..." The body positioned so that it formed a star, confirmed by that later line: "where my bones lie compassed." Obviously not a set of compasses, because the angles on such instruments are variable. It has to be the four main points of the magnetic compass: north, south, east and west.

Then also that warning, not to take metal into the grave.

"Yet by *ironic* touch my flesh immured
 Base metal traitoring this but perfect tomb..."

But for the metal, the tomb would have been perfect. (For the raising of the dead?) *Ironic touch*. That play on irony and the metal iron. Perhaps he had been buried in full armour, or an amulet, whatever, the metal touched his body and imprisoned it within the roots of the ragthorn. The miracle could not take place. Metal had negated the power of wood, a living substance. I am this much closer to an understanding.

March 18th, 1976

My great uncle is buried beneath the ragthorn. I say this without evidence of bones, or even a final letter from the strange man himself, but I sense it as surely as I feel the tree feeds from the stone.

This afternoon, with a trusted local man called Edward Pottifer, I excavated into the hillside beyond the drystone wall, where the valley slope begins to drop away steeply towards the stream. The ragthorn's roots have reached here too, but it soon became clear where Alexander himself had dug below the tree to make his tomb. We cleared the turf and found that he had blocked the passage with rubble, capping it with two slabs of slate. He must have had help, someone like Pottifer perhaps, because he could not have back-filled the passage himself. I suppose there is no record of his death because he knew it had to be that way. If a man took his body and buried it beneath that tree, it would have been done in the dead of night, in the utmost secrecy, for the church, the locals and the

authorities would surely have forbidden such a burial.

He knew the method, and yet I feel that he failed.

He is still there. I am afraid to dig into the ragthorn root mass. I am afraid of what I shall find. If he failed, what did he do wrong? The question has enormous importance for me, since I have no wish to repeat his failure.

I am ill. The illness will worsen.

April 12th, 1976

I have been studying the evidence and the manner and nature of the burial is becoming clearer. At Cambridge, Wilkins has sought out all the different meanings of the various key words and I am increasingly convinced that I have a firm knowledge of just how the body must be placed in the encompassing, protective cage of roots. The orientation of the body must be north-south, with the arms raised as in a cross to the east and west. There must be no metal upon or within it. The armour is stripped away, the weapons are removed. Metal is counter to the notion of resurrection, and thus I have left instructions that my back teeth are to be removed when I am dead.

May 1st, 1976

In preparation for that time when it comes, I have now – with the help of Pottifer – dug a passage several feet long into the side of the hill, below the ragthorn. I have finally taken the same route as that followed by William Alexander, but a hundred years has compacted the earth well, and it is no easy task. That we are on the right track is confirmed only by the mixture of slate that appears in the soil, and the fact that the thorn allows our excavation to continue in this direction. We press on, striking up, away from the bedrock. We did attempt other passages at first, but with every foot in the wrong direction there was a battle to be made with the protecting thorny roots. They snagged at our flesh and pulled at our hair, until we had to abandon those first diggings. The tree knows where it wants to put me.

May 3rd, 1976

I have found the remains of an infant! Thank God Pottifer was not with me at the time, for it would have shaken him badly. There is a reference in the passage from *Gilgamesh*: *and when the child was born, Utnapishtim gave it at once to Old Man Who Would Be Young, and the first berry appeared on the branches*. William Alexander planted this particular shoot or cutting of the tree and would have needed a similar offering. The thought horrifies me, that some mother in a nearby village, or some passing gypsy family, lost their newborn child one Victorian night.

May 10th, 1976

Pottifer has made the breakthrough. He came scuttling out of the hole, his face black with earth, his fingers bloody from his encounters with sharp slate and wild thorns.

"Bones!" he cried. "Bones, professor. I've found bones. Dear God in heaven, I touched one."

He stared at his hand as if it might have been tainted. I crawled into the passage and edged along to the place where he had found my great uncle. The

earth here was looser. The cage of roots was behind me and I could feel into what seemed to be a soft soil. It was possible to work my hands through and touch the dismembered bones and the ribs of the man who lay there. Every bone was wrapped around with the fibrous worm-like rootlets of the tree.

I became very disturbed. I was invading a place that should have been inviolate, and felt that I was an unwelcome intruder into this earthy domain.

My great uncle had failed to attain resurrection. He had done something wrong and now, I swear, the tree has his soul. It had sucked his spirit from his body to strengthen itself, perhaps to extend its root system, its power over the surrounding landscape? Was this the price of failure, to become the spiritual slave of the tree? Or am I just full of wild imaginings?

Whatever, the embrace of those roots is not a loving one, but one of possession. It was a cruel grip. The tree had hung on to the ash urn of Patroclus because the bones must not be burned. It had not released the flesh of Hamlet's father because there was metal on the body. Warriors and kings. My uncle was a warrior, in the field of archaeology. It had him too. I also have had my battles with the academics and scholars of my time. But I am determined to triumph.

When I touched my ancestor's skull, I drew back sharply, then probed again. There were no teeth in the jaws. The skeleton was also orientated correctly, north, south, east and west.

It was as I withdrew my probing hand from the soft-filled earth chamber that my fingers touched something cold and hard. I noted where it lay, that it was at the top of the leg, close to the spine, and clutched it and drew it out.

Edward Pottifer stared at the iron ball in my hand. "That's from an old gun," he said, and at once I remembered the story of my great uncle's skirmish in the Middle East. Yes. He had been shot and close to death. They had operated on him in the field, but then transported him, delirious, to a hospital in Cyprus, where he recovered. Had he not been aware that the bullet had remained in his body? He must have been under the impression that the bullet was removed from his body at that first operation. Of course, his back would have pained him at times, but old wounds do that, without iron in them. That must have been it, for he surely wouldn't have taken the chance, not after finding the method in *Hamlet*.

I did not mean to laugh. It was not disrespect, but relief. He had carried that iron ball into the grave with him. He had removed his teeth, perhaps gold-filled, but not the bullet.

I spoke carefully and succinctly to Edward Pottifer. I told him my teeth were to be removed at death. That my body was to be stripped and no metal, not even a cross around my neck, was to be buried with me. My body would be a cross. I marked clearly where my head was to be placed, and how my arms should be raised to the sides. "I will give you a compass. There must not be the slightest deviation."

He stared at me for a long time, his young face showing the anguish he felt. "When do you expect that might be, sir?" he asked me. I assured him that it would not be immediately, but that I was in my 50s now, and a very ill man. I told him to come every day to the house, to make sure I was still alive, and to



become familiar with me, and less afraid of me. And of course, I would pay him well for his services. Work was not easy to find in the dale, and the temptations of this offer were too strong for him: I have my gravedigger, and I know he can be trusted.

December 24th, 1976

As I write this I am experiencing a sense of profound awe. Young Wilkins is here, and he is frightened and shocked. He arrived at the cottage last night, an hour or so before I was ready to retire. I had not expected him. He had travelled from London that afternoon, and had decided not to telephone me from the station. I understand his reasons for coming without forewarning.

I wonder what it must have felt like for him to be picking through the decaying fragments of several old parchments – brought to Cambridge by Abdullah Rashid, who subsequently vanished! – separating by tweezers and pallet knife those shards of some ancient writer's records that showed any legible writing at all; how it must have felt to be sorting and searching, eyes feasting upon the forgotten words... and then to find John the Divine himself!

The writing is fragmentary. The state of ruination of the scrolls is appalling. The Arab traders who sought the vast wealth of the west had already cut each precious document into 40 pieces, thinking that by so doing they would increase 40-fold the value of their find. And they were struck by the Hand of Calamity as surely, as certainly, as if Jehovah himself had taken control of their fate. All of them are now imprisoned. Abdullah Rashid is now an exile (perhaps even dead?). Yet he was compelled to come to England, to seek me out... to bring his last "gift" (he asked for nothing in return) before disappearing into the night.

I was fated to discover these parchments. Wilkins was merely my representative. He had had no idea of what treasure might lie among them when he began to piece the fragments together, until he began to read the Greek words on that faded rotting scroll.

It is the last reference to the ragthorn that I shall discover. No more is needed. It is a fragment that has given me courage.

At last I understand my great uncle's reference to REVELATION! He had heard of the lost passage from Revelations of St John the Divine. Perhaps he saw them? It was enough for him too. Revelation! Triumph!

Oddly, the references to resurrection are not what has frightened Wilkins. If he is afraid it is because he feels that too many of his beliefs are being threatened. He has been sobered by the encounter. But he saw the words "thorn" and "rage" and has brought to me my final, most conclusive proof, that there is indeed a lost and forgotten mechanism for the resurrection of the dead, nature's alchemy, nature's embrace, a technique that defies science. No scientist will accept the revivification of the flesh under the influence of poison, and thorn, and root, and cold clammy earth. Why should they? But it happened! It has been recorded throughout history; it had begun, perhaps, in ancient Sumeria. There have been deliberate attempts to lose, to deny the fact... folios have been scratched out, poems obliterated, classics rewritten... the words of the ancients have been edited duti-

fully, perhaps by frightened servants not of God, but of dogma which preach only the resurrection of the soul...

Oh the irony! Oh the pleasure at what St John the Divine has told me.

It was all there for us to see, all the symbols, all the truths. The wooden cross, which He himself fashioned in his carpenter's shop, ready for the moment of his thricefold death, drowned, stabbed and hanged on the tree.

The Crown of Thorns, His mastery over the forest.

The immortal wood, the tree of life, the regenerating forest – of course it can shelter and protect the mortal flesh. There is in the tree, a symbol, a reality too powerful for monks with quill pens to dare to fight, to challenge. So they cut it out, they excised it. In this way, cutting out the soul of John, they cut the heart from the past.

He that dies by the wood shall live by the wood.

Perhaps I have the original copy of the parchment, the only copy remaining? It was found in a jar, in the hills of Turkestan, and had come into the possession of Abdullah... and had done so because it was meant to find its way into my hands.

For now I shall record in the journal only part of what St John said. It is from Chapter 10 of the Revelations. It might have preceded verse 3. It is my great hope. It has confirmed my faith in the rightness of what I shall achieve. A miracle occurred in the house of Lazarus.

And I looked into the Light, and Lo, I saw Him command a thorn tree to spring from the roof of the house of Lazarus. And the tree had seven branches and on each branch there were seven times seven thorns. And below the house seven roots formed a cradle around the dead man, and raised him up so that again his face was in the light.

So cometh the power of the Lord into all living things.

And again He cried: That ye might rise anew and laugh in the face of Death, and blow the dust from thy lungs in the eyes of Death, so that ye can look on Hell's face and scorn the fires and rage upon the flames and rise thee up.

And Lo, I saw how the thorn withered and died and the Angel of the Lord flew from its dust.

And He cried out in the voice of the Immortal King:

The Lord is in all things and He is in the One Tree.

He that dies by the wood shall live by the wood.

He that dies by the thorn shall live again by the thorn.

April 15th, 1978

Pottifer was here. I sent him to the tree, to begin to clear the chamber. The pain in my chest is greater than I can bear sometimes. I must refuse the sensible remedy of moving to London, to be closer to the hospital which can relieve such things, and extend my life, even though they cannot cure me.

Pottifer is very calm. We have kept the secret from the village and not even his family knows. He has managed to clear the root chamber whilst keeping the failed bones of my ancestor undisturbed below a thin

layer of soil. As long as I am within that quivering cage of thorns I shall succeed. I shall live again.

There is a great danger, however. I believe now that the tree took William Alexander, body and soul, for its own. Perhaps that is its exacted compensation for the failure of its disciples, to possess *all* that remains, not just the flesh, but the spirit also?

I know I have it right, and I can depend on Pottifer, completely, just as my great uncle must have depended on such a man. Pottifer is devoted to me, and obeys me implicitly.

September 11th, 1978 (extract)

The moment is very close. I have now acquired a set of dental pincers with which to perform the final part of the ritual. Pottifer has seen into my mouth and knows which teeth to pull.

September 20th, 1978

Pottifer is with me. I am certainly going. How vigorously the body clings to life, even when the mind is urging it to relax in peace. There is no longer any pain. Perhaps the closeness of death banishes such mortal agonies. I can hardly move, and writing is now an effort of will. This will be the final entry in my journal. Pottifer is very sad. I admire him. I have come to like him very much. His great concern is to get my body into the chamber before the rigor of death stiffens my limbs. I have told him to relax. He has plenty of time. Even so, he need wait only a few hours for the rigor to pass. I have thought of everything. I have missed no point, no subtlety. When I am gone, Pottifer will end this journal and wait for one year and a day before returning to Scarfell Cottage. These papers, I am sure, will not be there. They will be in my own hands. If they are still in evidence, Pottifer is to send them to young Wilkins, but I am absolutely certain that I will be here to decide their fate, just as I have decided my own.

Adieu, or rather, *au revoir*.

Sept 21

This is Pottifer. The doctor told me to rite this when he was gone. I berried him as he told me to, and no dificultes. His last words to me were Pottifer I must face Hell and look on its face like Saint John tells. He seemed very fearfull. I give him a kiss and said a prayre. He shouted out in pain. You do not understand I must first look on Hells face he shouted you must berry me face down.

I said to him, You are a good man doctor, and you shall not face Hell. You shall face Heaven as you deserve. Saint John does not need your penance. Do not be fearfull of Hell. You are to good and if you come back I shall be your good friend and welcome you straight.

Then he died. His fists were clenched

He is in the earth now and all that I have is his teeth, God bless him. I wanted to put a cross but the thorns have grown to much and there is green on the tree and I do not like to medle to much since there is more growth and very fast. No one has seen the tree so green and florished for a long time.

P. S.

This is Pottifer agen. I have got some thing more to

say. Some thing odd has hapened. It is more that one year and one day. The docter is still in the ground. I was in the pub and a man came in asked for a drink. He said he was a poet. I think he said his name was Betcherman. He had been walking near Scarfell and had seen the tree. He had felt some thing very strange about the place he said. He asked about the cottage but no one new and I said nothing. He wrote a poem down and left it on the table. He said there I have exercised this terrible place and you have this and be done with it. Then he left. Here is the poem. It makes me feel sad to read it.

*On a hill in highland regions
Stands an aged, thorny tree
Roots that riot, run in legions
Through the scattered scrub and scree:
Boughs that lap and lock and lace
Choke the sunlight from that place.*

*Deep below its tangled traces
Rots the corpse of one unknown
Gripped by roots whose gnarled embraces
Crush the skull and crack the bone.
Needled fingers clutch the crown
Late, too late to turn face-down.*

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Kilworth (left) & Holdstock (right)

Robert Holdstock & Garry Kilworth are two of Britain's best-known sf/fantasy writers. The latest solo novel by the former is *The Hollowing* (HarperCollins), and the most recent by the latter is *Angel* (Gollancz). Rob last appeared in *Interzone* with "The Bone Forest" (issue 45) and Garry with "Fossils" (issue 69); Garry also won our 1992 popularity poll with his previous story, "The Sculptor" (issue 60). The above co-authored tale first appeared in a slightly different version in Ellen Datlow's anthology *A Whisper of Blood* (USA, 1991). It is not normally our policy to reprint fiction, but we made a rare exception in this case because "The Ragthorn" gained praise in America and won a 1992 World Fantasy Award but has not hitherto been published in Britain in any form.

An Occupational Disease

Julian Flood

Basildon-Jenkins had taken the big desk by the window and moved the furniture around before I got to our new office. I was tucked away against the wall furthest from the light, without a desk, just a bare table with the computer perched uncomfortably far from the electricity socket. I thought about complaining, but I didn't in the end. It suited me really. I'd already done some Industrial Intelligence work you see; I've actually been in the field so I know a lot of the tricks. It's all in the rule book. Keep your surroundings simple, stay away from windows, lead a blameless life. Many an industrial agent has been betrayed because he failed to obey these simple guidelines.

There's no substitute for field experience, whatever the recruiters say when they trawl the universities. For me promotion into Industrial Intelligence Room 17 was a great step up from being an operative. Basildon-Jenkins thought nothing of it. He was a typical arrogant graduate, one of the new 12-week wonders. Straight from university, with his degree in mathematical philosophy or whatever in his top pocket where we comprehensive GCSE-failed types could see it and envy. He thought his three months training at Latimer was enough to qualify him as an expert in the business. We'd see about that.

We didn't talk much, not each other's sort of bloke, although he did kindly explain to me that Room 17 meant the whole building. It was a hangover from years before when we'd been a subsection of MI6, set up at the instigation of the legendary director who was known only as BJ. It's not the sort of info you pick up when you are a leg man.

One pleasant discovery I made about my companion was that he liked long lunch breaks. Error, that. Always stay longer than the others in your office, you never know what they might ferret out from your files. The first day I ate sandwiches at my table while filling out a requisition for a new filing cabinet. Basildon-Jenkins was happy enough with his Mk 4. Definite *big* error. I always use the latest model: the crackers haven't had so much time to work out new approaches. Change every few months and you just might stay ahead of them.

We'd been working for a week, each on our own separate problems, when I decided to get a sniff at his efforts. You may know the Mk 4, only three tumblers and susceptible to the freeze-pick. Quick puff of pick, the whole thing rotates and opens. If you hurry you can put it back

together and the owner can't tell you've been in. There was nothing in the first two files, routine correspondence about leave entitlement, that sort of thing. Then an unmarked file. I quickly photoed the contents and put it back, cursing as I noticed the telltale on the top right-hand side begin to change colour. The cabinet had been flooded with nitrogen and I'd let in the air – I'd forgotten it had that facility. He'd twig if I didn't sort something out.

I thought hard as I developed the prints in my new pocketlab (blank, he'd used dye-mismatched ink, not such a greenhorn after all). I had to scribble down what I remembered:

Dr Chang, a researcher in one of the new scientific mini-states in Micronesia, had been overcome with an attack of conscience and wanted to let us know what he was working on. Bio-tech of course. They've all become hugely rich by exporting a few grammes of exotic bio-products. You must have seen them, brain enhancers, instant nirvana, that sort of thing. They use the money to attract more brainy types, who invent new stuff and make them even richer. There was a TV programme a few weeks ago that reckoned they've got more power than the rest of the world put together. Basildon-Jenkins was in charge of finding out the details of what had upset Chang.

As I got my lunch and sat at a table by myself, I overheard one of the girls from the typing pool let out a good bit of info. She didn't know I was listening and she told her friend she'd heard that one of the new boys was slated for quick promotion. We had arrived on the same day, Jenkins and me, so we must both be in with a chance. A two horse race, obviously, and I was one of the horses. By the end of the meal I had a scheme. If I could show that Basildon-Jenkins was slack, unable to keep his own work secret, then I might just score a few points and get ahead in the race to the top floor. From the ease with which I'd attained my first success I didn't think it would be too difficult.

“How's your business getting on then, Jenkins?”

He'd taken the file out of his cabinet and my question hit him at the critical second, just before he looked at the tell-tale. Ever the gentleman, he had to look at me as he replied.

“Not too bad, old boy. I've twigged this chappy in Coralina who's keen to come across, but the snag is we can't get the stuff out. He's been cut off from contact now. Told us he'd get the message through somehow.

We'll be OK as long as we get someone to meet him face to face."

"Not such a difficult problem. Normally the hard bit's getting hold of the info while they try to hide it. All you've got to do is meet him."

"Well, not that simple, old boy. The Coralies have got him locked up. They sniffed out that he was trying to pass something over. I'm still trying to think of a way to get to him. What are you on?"

"There's a new process in Taiwan, very hush-hush. Still trying to get leverage on it." I didn't want to give too much away.

"Best of luck then. Well, back to work."

When he looked down at the file in his hand the telltale was already black, no way of knowing that it had started to change some time before. I'd be more careful next time.

After an hour he was off. Squash at his club, he said. The same club as the Director, I found out. Connections, that's what it takes in this business. I had a very frustrating afternoon. My new cabinet was so complex it took me three hours to open it.

I left his stuff alone for a couple of days, then had another look in his cabinet. The supervisor gave me a black mark for leaving early, but it was an emergency. Luckily I've got a big collar on my mac. With my sou'wester pulled down and the collar turned up, no-one could see my face as I pedalled frantically out of the car-park. I spent the entire night sitting in a Turkish bath sweating the marker off. Where his file-protection puffer had hit me on my right cheek the skin was still bright blue, even after scrubbing it with bleach. I covered it with sticking plaster and told Basildon-Jenkins I'd cut myself shaving.

"You look a bit groggy, old chap. Flushed, you know. Are you going down with flu?"

"I do feel a bit off. It's the job. I'm making progress and it's keeping me awake thinking about it." I was uncomfortably aware that a bit of blue skin was showing around the edge of the plaster. After all, there is only so much of your face you can cover up without looking silly.

"Can't see the point of losing sleep over your project. After all, even if some Taiwanese does produce a radical squash bottle redesign it's not going to shake the world, is it now?" He looked at me meaningfully when he said that.

I hoped he couldn't hear my teeth grinding as we worked that day. I hadn't told him what my case was. How had he guessed? Maybe he was tagging my computer – it was supposed to be emission-free but there are ways round that. I ordered a load of foolscap and started to write my records in longhand, using a biro I found in my desk drawer. Leaving the computer screen blank enhanced the decoding and made more processing power available to crack the central files. That got me the next bit of info, milked directly from the data stream as it left his computer. It was a computer memo straight to the first floor.

To: Room 17 Director: Personal from BJ: Most secret: 11/11/2: While appreciating that I am not fully aware of much of the picture, I would be failing in my duty if I did not most urgently draw your attention to the attached (Tag 45). Chang is not working on bio-products, he is working on full bio-organism manipulation. As you may know, this work has world-lethal implications and has

been banned by UN dictat. If he is working on gene-building in viruses, as seems possible (Tag 46), the Micronesian Breakaway Federation (MBF) could threaten all life. The importance of his contribution can be judged from the fact that he is still kept working while they have built what is essentially a gaol around his laboratory. I recommend most strongly that further resources be directed to this matter and that a maximum effort be mounted to get Chang's information out. It would be natural, as I am the incumbent case-officer, if all new operatives report via this desk. Basildon-Jenkins.

PS. Oofy at the club today says would you and Mimsy like a weekend's shooting? The pheasants are very good this year.

Talk about busy little empire builder! He spent most of the next week talking through a scrambler, with the mouth hood set to acoustic jabber. I had to live with pop-music blaring out from it. He looked really pleased with himself. I was interested to see he was using foolscap like me, writing with a pencil. I was getting through to him. My promotion seemed to be in the bag.

"Going well is it, Jenkins?"

"Beezer, old boy, beezee. Now I've been allocated the resources I'm getting on like a house on fire. You're doing well too, that girl hooked on Om should be a good contact. Silly habit, she must have known that it's the most expensive of all the nirvana drugs. Right little cracker too, she'll get to your Lee chappy if anyone can. You'll have your new beer bottle any day now. Toodle-oo, I'm off, got a date on the river this afternoon."

"Squash bottle," I snapped, but he'd gone.

How had he found that out? I tracked it down to the biro in the end. It had three little transducers and a transmitter buried inside. As I wrote an internal antenna broadcast the pressures acting on the tip so my writing could be intercepted and deciphered. I used a pencil after that. Just like him.

He'd made a mistake with the scrambler on one conversation, using a classical recording as the over-write rather than the more complex modern stuff. My de-scrambler got some of it and I copied it down as well as I could. Not a very successful steal, but it made good background.

Extract from telecon via covert acoustic descrambler: note, accuracy in some areas suspect: begin:

Well, girl you've gotcher delivery of sequencing equipment from the neighbouring island of pretty clothes, your chauffeur drives your full capability for manipulation. I mean, Chang's a genius, really first-class brain, everybody know, he could make really large-scale organisms from scratch, even up to planktonic scales. Lethal, if they monkey around your old girl is an heiress disrupt the world ecosystem St John's Wood. And I'm certain that it's this he wants to spill. They're up to something big and your father'd be there with her. Give us enough evidence to go to the UN and invade, we'll teach them don't play with me cos you're playin' with fire. End.

My next scheme worked better. That big desk of Basildon-Jenkins was a gift. It gave me lots of room to hide things. The first hyper-mike went in one corner, the second at the other and I got a perfect triangulation on the blotter. The mikes recorded the scratching of his pencil on their inbuilt

discs, and with a bit of processing I recovered everything he wrote on his pad. Each lunch hour and evening I retrieved the discs and watched as my software drew the loops and wiggles of his pencil point on my screen. Even then I wasn't home and dry. He'd not been taught handwriting at his fancy school and it was all I could do to make sense of it.

Memo by hand of operative: 17/11/2: To: Director Room 17: My operative 10 has prepared a report on the range of options available to us. I favour the use of UN inspection rights to send an ambassador to Coralia and speak to Chang face-to-face. We are dealing here with one of the great minds of the century; as such we should trust him. His first message asked for contact in this way, and I feel we should take this seriously. He will find a way to get his message out. I speak the local language well enough to get a taxi from the airport. Should I pack my swimmers? Yours, James.

The day before he left I went over to use the pencil sharpener, asking him rather pointedly to move his feet off the top of his desk so I could reach it. Never let your opponent near the soles of your shoes. Slippo spray is odourless, invisible, gives no problem on normal floor surfaces but when you put your foot on a stair tread, whammo! When he left, early again, I waited with bated breath. The crash was most satisfactory.

He saw me off from the airport himself, waving from his wheelchair when I caught the shuttle to New Zealand. His plastered leg stuck out and shone white in the winter sunshine. Looking back, I suppose that was my most telling victory, sweeter because he never knew it was me who fixed him. Talk about naïve! He was so pleased that I'd agreed to go at short notice he gave me his sun tan oil! Factor seven it said, but it didn't have that nasty smell you normally get. It looked just like cooking oil. Smelt a bit like it too.

When I got back I was scratching all day. "That oil you lent me was useless," I told him. "The plane was delayed, so I managed one day on the beach and the doctors at the hospital said I was lucky not to be in for a week. My back looks like a photo of the moon."

"But you did get to Chang?"

"Sort of. He was in this big room like a goldfish bowl. No contact face to face, just a mike and loud-speaker so we could talk through the glass." I sneezed and blew my nose. "Sorry. Just my luck, go to a tropical island and come back with a streaming cold. Filthy, unhygienic people, nearly everyone on the island had a cold, sneezing all over the place. Disgusting, really disgusting. Glad to be back, even if it is raining." I coughed and inhaled my Vick.

"So no chance of a message?"

"Not a hope. Sorry. We just chatted about how happy he was to be working in Coralia."

Actually it was a nice enough place for someone who had the brains to be recruited by one of the mini-states, what with all the palm trees, coral beaches, surf and sun. Pretty girls too, but I'd remembered the rules. What a pity, that girl in the hotel had seemed genuine, but you can never be sure in this line. She'd been really hurt when I stood her up. She went off

with an unemployed bloke on a DSS holiday from Mablethorpe.

We sat in the office without talking for days after that. Basildon-Jenkins thought and thought. I coughed a lot. One evening, when I tried to recover my acoustics to unload the discs, some gizmo I'd never seen before heated them up so much they blistered my hands. When I dropped them on the floor they burned a hole right through the carpet. I spent half the night patching it with a bit I cut out from under my table. Jenkins said nothing when I dragged myself into the office late the next day, bags under my eyes, nose still running. I was unreasonably pleased to see that he had caught the cold as well. I felt light-headed and facetious. Not like myself at all.

"What can you give away and still keep?" I asked him after he had produced one particularly enormous sneeze. He looked puzzled. "It's a riddle. What can you give away and still keep?"

"I give up," he sighed after a moment.

"A cold," I laughed. He looked at me as if I'd come out from under a stone. Then his face brightened.

"Hurt your hands?"

"Burnt them on the cooker this morning."

He smiled slightly and went back to his brooding. Then...

"EUREKA," he shouted and I jumped so hard I broke my pencil.

He scribbled frantically, blew his nose on his hanky and stuffed the poncy bit of silk into a plastic bag! Disgusting. I'd heard that public schoolboys have no manners but this was the first time I'd seen it in action.

"Just off to the DNA lab. Keep an eye on things" he said as he ran out.

Quickly I sprayed his desk with emphasis dust and pressed the conductive sheet over the pad from which he'd torn the note. There was an enormous flash and I was hurled against the wall. When I came round (some sort of short circuit, I suppose) I cleared up his desk very gingerly. At least I got a good print of what he'd written. I was sitting down trying to make sense of the note – I mean, who is going to write "Try to decipher this" on a dirty hanky? – when he came back in, whistling. It took me all day to smooth down my hair. It had an alarming tendency to stick up at every angle and crackled beneath my fingers.

The final memo I read in clear. He left it on his desk at cease-work one day, and I had to lock it away for him.

To: Director, etc. It was all in the redundant code of the virus. Sequence one, says the technical chappy. The Coralia scheme is to fix carbon dioxide using bio-engineered plankton and induce reverse greenhouse effect. The ice caps would grow apparently. The ones who would gain most when sea levels fall are the Pacific islands, Coralia particularly. They'd end up with a country the size of France.

The information is very detailed – in bastardized ASCII code and quadral numerics of all things. It is certainly the most brilliant bit of genetic engineering ever attempted. The UN won't be able to squirm out of this one, they'll have to invade. By the way, Mimsy says if you don't come home tomorrow she'll let me drink all your cold cure; as well as mine. James."

They promoted him! After all his bungling, all those security lapses, they promoted him! Over my head! I can't understand it. Everything he did was slack. Let me give you an example. The final report on his project, he even let that go out with a typographical error in the title. He can't have done any proof-reading at all. I mean, what sense can you make out of "The Cold That Came in From the Spy"?

Julian Flood's previous stories for us were "The Jade Pool" (issue 57; praised by many of our readers) and "Children of a Greater God" (issue 62). When not writing stories and (as-yet unpublished) novels, he runs a plant nursery near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

Interaction

Continued from page 4

by an overbearing female environment, that homosexuals aren't part of society and that same-sex practice has always been abhorred and feared.

Contrary to the Author's Note, very little of his story is anthropologically correct. None of the above myths existed in that era. They were invented and encouraged in recent history.

I shan't pick on Barton as he doesn't flatter himself anyway if it is his experience that women need to be bribed for sex, but I am dismayed at you, the editors. I had expected *Interzone* to be one progressive answer to many mainstream intolerances. I didn't expect it to give support to medieval, Catholic bigotry. Please tell me that this story was a bad exception and that such ideas are not normally given the time of day.

Richard Kerr
Belfast

Editor: Oh dear, here we go again (see most of the correspondence in this magazine over the past six months).

Dear Editors:

I haven't seen anything about the Hugo nominations yet, but with 12 stories on the *Locus* Recommended Reading List, this could be – should be – *Interzone's* year. I presume that the World Science Fiction Society still has *IZ* classified as a semiprozine (which has a decidedly patronizing ring to it), but one way or another, David Pringle should walk off with one of those Oldsmobile bonnet ornaments in September. I will be in San Francisco to vote for him and I hope there will be a large contingent of British readers to do the same.

While we are there, I would like to petition the WSFS to amend Article 2.2.7. of its Constitution, which defines a professional publication as "...one which has an average press run of at least ten thousand (10,000) copies per issue." In the case of *Interzone*, this is patently ridiculous. It is not only the only British periodical of indisputable professional quality, it also consistently prints stories which are at least

as good as those published in *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, *Amazing* and the rest. But it just isn't going to reach an average press run of 10,000 in the foreseeable future. The wording of the proposed amendment has yet to be decided and, indeed, that is what I would like to consult fellow *IZ* supporters about on day one or two of the convention.

My name will be on the message board. Please contact me.

Robert Carrick
Malaga, Spain

Editor: This is extremely kind of you. I'm afraid I can't afford to go to San Francisco myself, whether to "walk off" with a Hugo Award or not, but I wish you the best of luck in your attempt to reform the rules of the competition.

Dear Editors:

I recently bought the first ten issues of *MILLION* following an advertisement in *Interzone* (which I came to via *London Review of Books*). I am delighted with *MILLION*; the magazine has the effect of making me want to read more widely in popular fiction. Detective stories and thrillers are my favourites, though I also read westerns and science fiction from time to time. I have dozens of suggestions for features I would like to see...

Richard Hazlehurst
Penrith, Cumbria

Editor: Alas, there will be no more issues of *MILLION* as a separate magazine (see the announcement on the inside front cover of this issue). We had hoped to build a platform for the unprejudiced discussion of popular fiction in all forms and media, but I was amazed to discover how few people could even comprehend the purpose of the magazine, much less take any real interest in it. There were some hundreds of exceptions, of course – such as you, Mr Hazlehurst – but it seems there is no great public for a magazine which sets out to explore and discuss popular fiction (outside the area of films, that is). Popular music is a subject which can sustain countless magazines, but not so popular fiction. A pity! We shall, however,

continue to support any other endeavours in the area of "pop-fic studies" and from time to time bring you news of such other magazines as may exist in this area of interest. Keep watching these pages.

Dear Editors:

I co-edit *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* (St Martin's Press) with Terri Windling. The first, second and fourth volumes, published in 1988, 1989 and 1991 won the World Fantasy Award for best anthology. The sixth annual collection will be out in August 1993. We are now reading for the seventh. This will include all material published in the year 1993.

I am looking for stories from all branches of horror: from the traditional-supernatural to the borderline, including high-tech science-fiction horror, psychological horror or anything else that might qualify. If in doubt, send it. This is a reprint anthology so I am only reading material published in or about to be published during the year 1993. The submission deadline is December 15th 1993. Anything sent after this deadline will reach me too late to be considered for 1993. And the sooner I get the material the better.

There is a section in the front of the book that covers "the year in horror," and "the year in fantasy." These include mention of magazines and publishing news concerning the horror and fantasy fields, novels we've read and liked, and in my section, "odds and ends" – material that doesn't fit anywhere else but that I feel might interest the horror reader (like trading cards, strange nonfiction titles, art books, etc). But I have to be aware of this material in order to mention it. The deadline for this section is January 30th 1994.

When sending material to me please write YEAR'S BEST HORROR on the envelope. Terri Windling's address is: 781 S Calle Escondido, Tucson, Arizona 85748, USA. She covers fantasy exclusively and I cover horror exclusively.

Ellen Datlow
c/o OMNI Magazine
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Fifteen Years of Nothing, Then an Overnight Success

Simon Green interviewed by Sally-Ann Melia

The best introduction to Simon Green is to quote his vital statistics. In 1988 Simon Green sold seven novels, followed in 1989 by two more novels and a commission to write a novelization of the film *Robin Hood – Prince of Thieves* starring Kevin Costner. With an initial print run of 750,000, the book of the film was a runaway success. Similarly Simon Green's career: two new sf novels are out in the UK this year, a third in 1994 and three more are in the pipeline. I asked Simon Green, how does it feel?

"Fifteen years of nothing, then an overnight success. It goes to show that if you stick at it long enough you can make it. People ask me: how do you do it? I just say, well, I was too dumb to know I was beaten. I was just not going to give up. The world was telling me, you have no talent, stop wasting your time. I said, 'No'; I said, 'the books are good.' I was right and they were wrong and that is a wonderful feeling. The point often is that you have got to keep writing. Keep the books going out, so that when opportunity knocks you have got something to show."

Ghostworld, Simon Green's new novel, is a sequel to *Mistworld*. "The idea is that *Mistworld*, *Ghostworld* and *Hellworld*, set up the new sf trilogy I am writing now. In each of these three books you will find different types of people, Investigators, Espers, Marines, and how they function. It also introduces the Empire – *Mistworld* is set outside the Empire, *Ghostworld* is on the edge of the Empire, *Hellworld* is just inside the Empire. The new trilogy will be about the rebellion itself as the various allies come together to fight the Empire, then afterwards fight each other to see which political system will replace the Empire.

"It's not strictly space opera, there is much more a Cyberpunk feel. A lot of the old empires, *Star Wars* and that kind of empire, are fairly feudal, usually based on European models. To be blunt, they are old-fashioned. I wanted this empire to be much more up to date. I wanted to bring in the cyberpunk ideas, when technology has become a part of life, everyone has

implants and computer matrixes. There are augmented people like cyborgs, genetically altered people, Espers.

"And it won't be like galactic wars in the past. Remakes of World War II, all! I mean, honestly, duelling spaceships and dog-fights! The really trendy ones are remakes of Vietnam. We have moved on from that now. You have seen the Gulf war, the Falklands war and the difference technology made to how wars are fought as opposed to how wars used to be fought. You take that and you extrapolate it and you have an entire different way of telling a war story.

"I mean, I like the *Star Wars* films, but I kept thinking: where is the money coming from to pay for all these rebel forces, spaceships and so on? How easy would it be if you had this really powerful empire and this one planet with no funds, no backup, hanging on by their fingernails as the only rebel planet? What would that be like? Given an Empire that powerful, what could fight back? Let's be realistic! The idea took off from there and the world grew as I was writing *Mistworld*."

I asked Simon Green to tell me a little more about the characters of *Ghostworld*, the Investigators, Espers, Marines. They seem somewhat limited as to what they can or cannot do – was he thinking of a role-playing game?

"No, I did play role-playing games a long time ago, but it did not influence my characters. I think what I did get from the role-play games is a much more practical, 'hands-on' feel to characters. What they can and cannot do. Something I always pick up on is: Where is the light source? A lot of my stories, including *Mistworld*, are based in very dark cities. The character has a torch in one hand, a sword in the other, a backpack... Wait a minute, how does he juggle all this? So I am very careful as to where the light source is. Who is carrying what and so on. It makes it more realistic. For instance, look at the Hell squads in *Hellworld*.

"Imagine you have discovered a new planet: it is basically like Earth, that

much you can tell from outer space. So, you send down an expendable squad to see what is really down there. If the Hell squad survives, then the colonists move in. If the Hell squad gets wiped out, nobody cares because they are expendable. For the Hell squad themselves, this is the very last chance. They have to survive on an alien planet. There will be no rescue. Either they survive or they die.

"And the Espers well... In most books, ESP is like magic! People with ESP, Espers, can do anything. So I thought, no – the Espers can do this much, can go so far, and no further. Often the Espers are not too sure what they are getting, they are receiving impressions they can't always interpret. The Espers are powerful, but they are conditioned and controlled by the Empire. Also look out for the occasional elf. Here and there in the forthcoming book you hear: The elves are rebelling, the elves are a problem. Elves are members of the Esper Liberation Front, ELF. But then according to Wendy Bradley, I am an elf myself. She said so, when reviewing *Blue Moon Rising*. Nice review too!"

Blue Moon Rising was one of the seven books Simon Green sold in 1988. "It's my favourite novel. When I started to write I was a big fan of Douglas Adams's *Hitch-hiker* books. What I tried to do with *Blue Moon Rising* was to take every single cliché and turn it 180 degrees. The Dragon is the good guy. The Princess is the fighter. The Prince is absolutely useless at coming up with plans. The other characters keep looking at the Prince and saying: 'Is that the best you can do? Yes? Then we're in trouble, guys!' Every time you think you know where the book is going, it goes somewhere else. Even though it is a comedy, the book gets darker and darker. More and more goes wrong. At the end, an entire castle, an entire kingdom is gone. Wiped out. Five characters ride away on the Dragon and everything else is the Darkwood. Hopefully by that stage the reader is saying, what the hell is going on? How do we get out of this? Please,

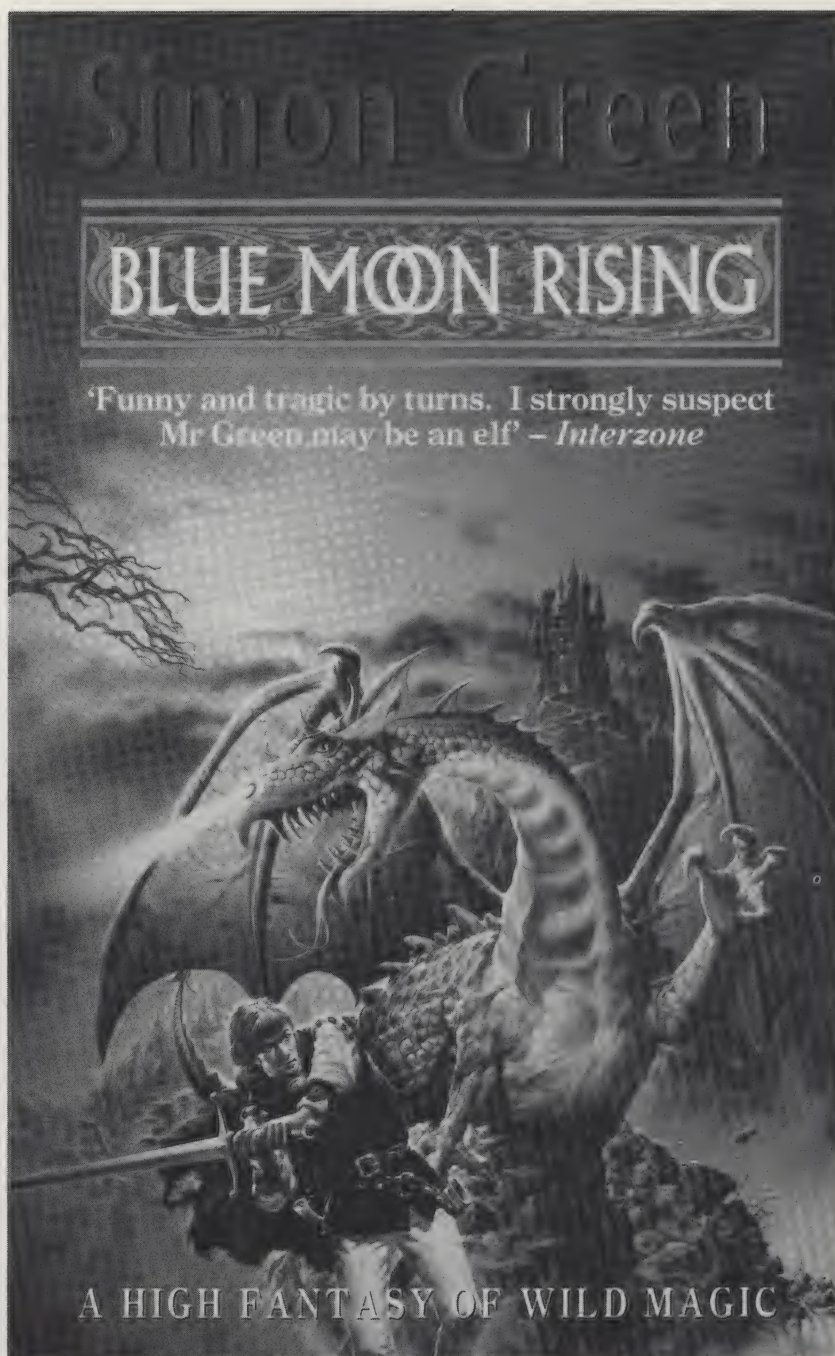
read the book. *Blue Moon* is most representative of what I do. It is funny, it is fast moving and it is different, I hope."

It was followed by *Blood and Honour*, not exactly a sequel but set in the same world. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the six *Hawk and Fisher* books are also based in the same world. "The world is basically split into two ends, the North and the South. The South is a little bit more advanced. Though I have not actually gone into this yet. There is a large area between the two called the Deadlands. This is essentially an area destroyed by the Magicians' wars, centuries earlier. Nothing lives there and nothing can live there. The only way you can get from North to South is by ship, around the side of the continent. Ships are few and far between. So in the North you still have candles and water clocks, in the South you have clockwork and striking matches. I will talk about this more in future books."

In the male-dominated genre of SF & F, Simon Green writes strong, original heroines. "Having been a student, having worked with women who I knew were my intellectual equals – actually, they were smarter than me most of the time – I wanted a female character who would stand up and do things. Right from the start of *Blue Moon Rising*, Princess Julia takes no prisoners. You don't mess about with Princess Julia or you carry your lungs home in a bucket! Also, in the *Hawk and Fisher* books, part of the fun is that Hawk (male) was the one who was the thinker, the doer, whereas Fisher (female) kicked ass. I sometimes worry that I overreact and make my women too strong. Still, watching men react to that kind of character is fun in itself. I like the female characters in *Blue Moon Rising* the best. I love Lady Cecilia. She is the Joan Collins of the book, all the men revolve around her, all the men are affected by things she does, even though they don't always realize it. I think the bit where she gets killed is my favourite sad bit. The guard, her lover, just sits there and rocks her in his arms. My favourite sad bit."

All the books are quite political, so is Simon Green politically inclined himself? "More than I used to be – that is what having three Tory governments does to you. Essentially it is one of those things which to my mind has been ignored in fantasy fiction a great deal. You have Kings and Queens, they have great armies and the armies do things. It wasn't like that. I studied history, so I have a fair idea of how medieval Europe functioned, which a lot of other fantasy writers don't have."

What was his degree? "I have a combined Humanities degree, and



I wanted to write about an election in a fairly feudal state. How would one affect the other? *Devil Take the Hindmost*, No. 2 in the *Hawk and Fisher* series, is the single political book I wrote. It's about a general election. It's about the dirty tricks you can pull when over half the voting population isn't literate. I wrote it during the 1987 election, and I was keeping a very close eye on the result. I like to think my books do not have a political viewpoint, I try to get as many viewpoints in as I can. No, I'm not really political."

So let's go back a bit: how did he get started? "I started writing seriously in 1973. I was a student in London and I wrote steadily for four years. I sold my first story in 1977 and I had a sudden rush as six or seven stories all sold in a row to semi-pro magazines. In 1979,

all the semi-pro markets 'disappeared' practically overnight. I couldn't give my stuff away. I kept writing and getting nowhere. In 1985, I was made redundant. I spent three and a half years unemployed. I was 30; I had a BA and a MA. Everywhere I went they said 'You are too old and over-qualified.' I wrote seven novels during that period.

"Finally, in 1988 I got a job at Bilbo's bookshop in Bath. I started work on the Monday. On the Wednesday I got this letter from America saying: 'You know that book you sent us two years ago, the *Hawk and Fisher* book; we want to publish it. By the way, would you be interested in doing five more novels featuring the same characters? So I said 'Yes, I could be persuaded, I think.' That was how I got my start. A contract for six novels, one written

every four months to meet tight deadlines. I just about made it.

"Also at that time I got an agent, Joshua Bilmes of Scott Meredith—they are one of the big agencies in America. I had written a very long novel, *Blue Moon Rising*, 700 pages of manuscript, which had been rejected by absolutely everyone. All the American publishers, all the British publishers, everyone. I went to Scott Meredith and said: 'Perhaps you can get a sale where I can't.' They wrote back and asked for a reading fee of 500 dollars.

"I was still unemployed at this point. \$500 was about £375, and I was living on £28 a week. I thought, if I don't do it, I'm always going to wonder what would have happened if I had. So I emptied out my savings, sold some stuff, some books, most of my comics... I had to sell a complete run of *Silver Surfer*, would you believe it? They are worth their weight in gold these days. I had to sell them at a low price too. But it was worth it. Scott Meredith loved *Blue Moon Rising* and agreed to represent me. In 1988, the novel sold to NAL. I thought great.

"**R**obin Hood—Prince of Thieves was the real breakthrough for me. You have to remember, when they were filming *Robin Hood* Kevin Costner was not at all well known. He had just finished making *Dances with Wolves* and the advance word was not good. A three-hour long western with subtitles? Everyone was going 'Kevinsgate, Kevinsgate...' So Ace got the novelization rights fairly cheap. No one else wanted them.

"As I understand it, they looked down their list of authors and said: 'Who have we got to write it?' And someone said: 'We have got this Simon Green bloke, he's English.' Ooh, English! Robin Hood is English. We'll have him. They spoke to my agent and said: 'Is he cheap?' Dirt cheap! 'Is he fast?' He's very fast! So my agent rang me up and said: 'Do you want to do it?' And I said: 'Well I don't know, I've never done one before. It could be interesting. It's different. What's the money like?' 'Not good, but I've got you a sweetener. I've got you a royalty!' A four percent royalty, which is very very rare for a novelization, in fact it is almost unheard of. They were that keen to get someone to do it and do it quickly!

"I was given the screenplay and wrote the book based on that, doing my best to make it a Simon Green book, with all the qualities of the film's voice. I wrote the book in two months as specified. When the film came out, it was mega! *Robin Hood* was everywhere, my book was everywhere. I think the first printing was 750,000 copies. It went into a second print of 200,000 for further orders. Almost a million books bearing my name on the

shelves! They sold really well. It was a best-selling book. Ace rang me up. 'You're a bestseller,' they said. I said: 'Great, what is selling?' *Robin Hood*. Oh well, oh great, so *Robin Hood* is a bestseller! Now all my books in America have: 'By the Best-Selling author of *Robin Hood—Prince of Thieves*.' I made a nice bit of change from the royalties too.

"After that I sold two books: *Down Among the Dead Men* from the unemployed period, then *Shadows Fall*. This is the first book I had a chance to do on my own, away from the Ace conditions, and I think it is the best book so far. The idea is essentially that there is a small town in the back of beyond which is an elephant's graveyard for the supernatural. It has a mass of everything: creatures, concepts. It is very funny, very fast-moving. It is coming out at the beginning of next year from Victor Gollancz.

"I have a new contract to do three books over two years for NAL. This is going to be one very long science-fiction novel in three volumes. 500-600 pages per volume to make one long book. That is what I am writing now, a sort of cyberpunk *Winds of War*, for want of anything else to call it.

"I gave up my Bath job when I got the Hawk and Fisher contract through at the end of 1988. Basically I had to, to meet the deadlines. I had never tried to meet a deadline before. When you are unemployed you work or you don't work, there is no pressure to finish by a certain time. Luckily all the books made it, a few of them were a few weeks over. Towards the end I got it down to an exact science, a month of plotting, two months of writing and a month's polishing. In a sense I was writing four pages a day, day in, day out. On average four, which doesn't sound like a lot, but when you are doing books that are fairly complex, it can take you an awful lot of time just getting set up to a point when you can start writing. You have to go through the plot, this is what has to happen. Check out the characters, how they had to grow over the period, then do a scene-by-scene layout, paragraph by paragraph, and then write it. So it could take me up to a week before I could set the first paragraph on the page. I was glad to do this once. I would not like to do it again.

"A deadline on the whole is a good thing, it concentrates the mind, you have got to sit down and put the words on paper. The hardest part of writing is writing the first sentence of the day. Once I have got that down on paper, I'm OK. It's not unknown for me to sit for half an hour, an hour, two hours to get that first line on paper, because at the beginning of the day everything looks awful. It looks trite. You have done it before. It doesn't sound right. You can't quite nerve yourself to jump

in the deep end. So every day it is a struggle to get that first line down. I'm doing better, I've got it down to a quarter of an hour at the moment. That is what a deadline does, it gives you the strength to say: 'I've got to get the first line down, I've got four pages to write today.' Some writers can't write to deadlines, they need to take a year, two years, I like to have a bit of pressure to keep me moving, basically."

I asked Simon Green to tell me about broadswords. "There are two things, really. One, having worked with D&D and having seen real swords, I know they weigh a ton. Two, if you have ever seen broadswords in medieval castles, there is about three feet of blade and you need both hands to lever it off the ground. So one thing I am always careful to say is that my sword fights don't last long, because you get tired very very quickly.

"The reason I have swords in the science-fiction books harks back to the 1950s and 60s. Books then were all phasers, lasers or radium guns, so what do you need a sword for? You can't get close enough to kill people with a sword. But I like using swords, so I thought up a gun that you could still use together with a sword, the disrupter gun. The model is the Musketeers. During that period in France, you had a rifle, but it took a long time to prime, to put the gunpowder in, insert the projectile, fire it, then start again. So they still used swords. Similarly a disrupter fires a pretty lethal beam of energy, then it takes two minutes to recharge before you can shoot again. A lot can happen in two minutes! Swords don't need recharging. Also I just like writing sword-fights, they are fun to write. Keep it interesting, guys! I used to be a fencer, I have the bronze standard fencing medal, but I gave it up after I got appendicitis. The gut muscle is a very important part of fencing. Once I had got over the injury, I had lost interest as I was off doing other things. I was into acting.

"I never wanted to be a writer, I wanted to be an actor! I was getting professional acting gigs before I got writing gigs, I was on stage, I've done television, I've done film. You won't have seen me, it was all extra's work. The first thing I ever did was in Leicester. I was a student, doing my MA there. At the Haymarket Theatre they were doing a production of *She Stoops to Conquer*, a Restoration comedy with a Georgian setting. The director said: 'I want a Georgian pit band to play Georgian music as a background to the action on stage.' Somebody took him to one side and said: 'Real musicians cost money, we don't have the budget. You'll have taped music and like it.' So they hired five idiots to stand every night in full costume and a wig, miming to the taped music. I played

the flute. Five pounds a week and my bus fare. This wasn't a lot even in 1977, but it was my first acting gig.

"I worked in films. I was an extra in Dick Turpin's Greatest Adventure. I worked from half-six in the morning to half-eight in the evening. There was nowhere to sit and it was freezing cold. By the end of the day you could have taken me away on a stretcher. I was finished. I was not coming back tomorrow, except I had to. I had signed a contract. Oh God...Extras earn their money, I've got to say it. Still, £15 a day is slightly better than £5 a week.

"I had one lead: I was in a play called *The Foggy Dew* based on a well-known folk-song. The guy who was due to play the lead dropped out, because he was doing television and they changed the shooting times. The director happened to be in the shop where I was working. The shop manager said: 'We've got a guy here who does some acting. Why don't you ask him?' So I said: 'Yeah, I'd love to.' When I got the script home, I realized they were offering me the lead. It was a two-and-a-half hour play and I was on for two and a quarter hours. It was all blank verse, I had to learn and sing six songs unaccompanied. We had one week's rehearsal, two dress rehearsals and I was on. If someone had told me I could have learnt all that, I would have said: 'No way!' But I had no choice, I just had to sit down and learn it. It was a short run, a week, but it was my one lead. I am very proud of it.

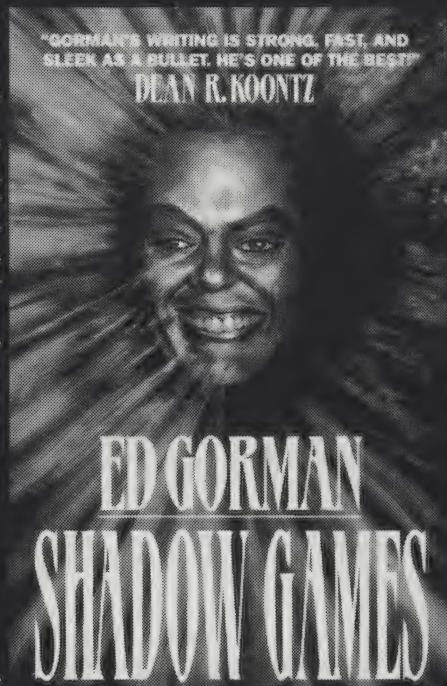
"A certain amount of my acting turns up in *Blood and Honour*, where we have the Great Jordan. I like to think I would have become like him, if I had stayed an actor. I was heading towards that. There are some nice pieces in *Blood and Honour* — he comes on and says: how did I do, how's my act going, am I fooling people? I like that. I wanted to be an actor, I still do. I'll get there yet, I'll go to RADA as a mature student.

"I have a screenplay I am working on. The trouble is the kind of stuff I write, my prose, is fairly lengthy with a lot of detail. This is not right for film. So I'm working at it but there's no deadline to it, so I work at it when and if I feel like it. I would love to write for the stage. After the current three sf books, if there is time to spare, I might take a break to do something different to clear the palate.

"I have been very lucky. I have editors who enjoy my books. Richard Evans said to me: 'I knew I was on to a good thing after reading the first Hawk and Fisher book and I thought, great, I've got five more of these to read.' So, touch wood, I have been very lucky, with editors, with publishers, with publicity people. I keep waiting for the hammer to fall, the lightning to hit me, but so far... It's been great." ●

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Ansible Link

David Langford



The 1993 British Easter SF convention, Helicon in Jersey, is still an exhausting memory as I write. Brian Aldiss claimed that he managed to remain placid even when a reporter asked him if he also wrote under the name Harry Harrison. Iain Banks enigmatically crawled around under the carpet in the bar. Countless foreigners were present, including 52 Romanians and a handful from New Zealand: a Russian contingent was selling KGB credentials at exotic prices to sf suckers, and in due course attendees were warned to "beware the midnight knock on the door from authors Aldiss, Harrison and McCaffrey (who will be carrying a small, monogrammed flame thrower)." Soft toy lovers were outraged by the art-show exhibit of a teddy bear strung up with ghastly hooks à la *Hellraiser*. "Text is terrifying!" admitted John Clute. A panel called "Crisis in Publishing" was cancelled through lack of interest. Unwisely, the "Erotic SF" panel was not cancelled and became a discussion of cashpoint-style machines for instant sex: "Surely," mused Brian Ameringen, "when you cross a teledildonics machine with a cashpoint you get someone coming into money?" Guests of honour George R.R. Martin, John Brunner and artist Karel Thole all appeared to have a good time. I passed the days editing Helicon's newsletter, whose scoops about broken beds, Ian Watson's underpants, gigantic corage fines for illicit parties, and Malcolm Edwards's son's views on soft white bums are all, perhaps, unsuited to this family magazine. The same goes for Ramsey Campbell's eldritch, oozing, unhalloved and blasphemous restaurant reviews. Out in the real world, *The Independent* newspaper proffered insights into the elusive flavour of sf conventions: "Otherwise, it is unclear who these people are. They could be someone's neighbour or relative..." Hard-hitting stuff, difficult to refute.

Pilgrims on the Road to Nowhere

Iain Banks endeared himself to non-Tory hearts by refusing to attend the Best of Young British Novelists launch party at the Saatchi Gallery. Though he's one of the chosen 20 authors, he objected to the dread name Saatchi as redolent with memories of Margaret Thatcher's iron rule. (Note for overseas: Saatchi and Saatchi were the posh publicity outfit

hired to make Thatcher's Conservative Party look plausible, friendly and nice.)

Barrington Bayley, according to his ever-reliable agent Gamma, "is writing this great book about robot sex! Robots with children!"

David Britton of Savoy Books (whose controversial novel *Lord Horror* was impounded, prosecuted and then rescued on appeal last year) was jailed for four months this April, under the Obscene Publications Act. This followed from further raids on his bookshops by Manchester police, whose relentless attacks on Britton and Savoy can of course have nothing whatever to do with *Lord Horror*'s satirical send-up of their famously diligent, Bible-bashing and homophobic (ex-) Chief Constable James Anderton...

Stephen Hawking, closet Trekkie, visited the *Star Trek: The New Generation* set and eagerly took up the invitation to appear in a future episode – as a hologram of himself, playing poker with another of Einstein. (*Einstein*: "God does not play poker with the Universe...")

Justin Leiber decided that his late father Fritz's sf award trophies should be distributed among his friends rather than gather dust with his papers at the University of Texas. Don Herron, editor of the Philip K. Dick letters, received several: Hugo, Nebula, British Fantasy and World Fantasy Awards. He writes: "All these awards, except the Hugo, make great bookends. The Hugo is fucking useless. It's pretty, though."

Terry Pratchett, on his recent Australian visit, was reported as consuming witchetty grubs and anticipating the future pleasure of describing this act to Brits with delicate stomachs.

Andy Sawyer, sf reviewer and long-term editor of the BSFA *Paperback Inferno* reviews magazine, has been appointed as the SF Foundation's first paid administrator since 1980. 55 candidates were locked in a death struggle for this post; Sawyer was chosen from a shortlist of six (which included Brian Stableford).

George Turner, the 76-year-old Australian sf author, suffered a stroke in late April and – unable to speak – simply waited three days until his biographer phoned and deduced from the silence after he lifted the receiver that something was wrong. At last report Turner was still recovering in hospital but said to be extremely cheerful.

Infinitely Improbable

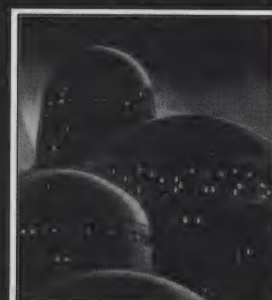
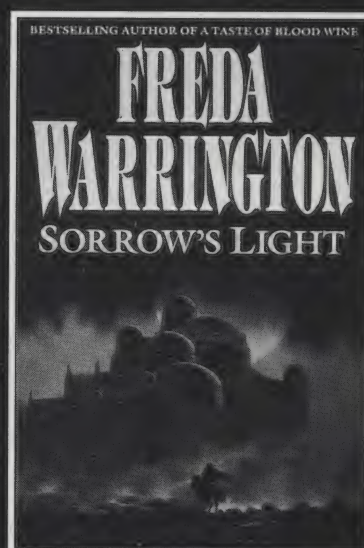
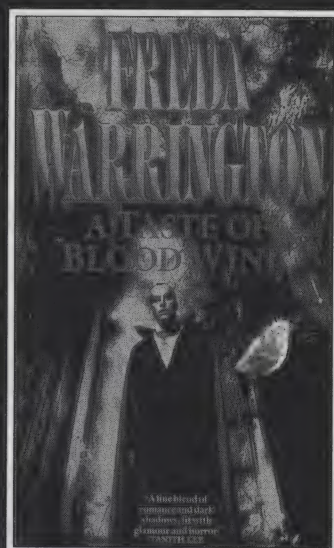
The Greasy Pole: Miscellaneous Awards. Nebula awards went to Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book* (novel), James Morrow's "City of Truth" (novella), Pamela Sargent's "Danny Goes to Mars" (novelette), Connie Willis's "Even the Queen" (short). Grandmaster award: Frederick Pohl. The Philip K. Dick novel award was won by Richard Grant's *Through the Heart*; Greg Egan's *Quarantine* got the Australian Ditmar award for best long fiction, and the British Eastercon long text award went to Geoff Ryman's *Was...* For the sake of sanity I will spare you the endless list of 1993 Hugo nominations. The Hugo novel shortlist comprises Maureen F. McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*, John Varley's *Steel Beach*, Vernor Vinge's *A Fire upon the Deep* and Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book*. *Interzone* got its customary doomed nomination as "semi-prozine" (a Hugo category reserved by tradition for the US news magazine *Locus*), and our very own Jim Burns is a contender in the "original artwork" section (his cover for something called *Aristoi*). Stung by an IZ 71 comment about this becoming a Langford self-hype page, I ruthlessly suppress my own nominations. So there.

Confabulation was the convention bid that won the vote at Helicon to become the 1995 British "Eastercon," held in London Docklands. The convention logo shows a typical denizen of that area, looking like a reindeer to me, but the committee claims it's a moose. ("We will offer," they promised, "reindeer tasting and stag parties.") Enquiries to 3 York Street, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH.

SF Encyclopaedia Update. This epic volume sold like warmish cakes at Helicon; one far-flung visitor tottered off with five copies. A disaffected sf reviewer claimed to hear an Orbit publicist say: "We don't send review copies to genre journalists 'cos they'll all have to buy it anyway." John Clute reported in some elation that only about 200 errors had been detected by May. The *Nimbus* CD-ROM edition is expected around the end of June; meanwhile computer magazines were reporting an exciting new spinoff, being "the first Colour Look-Up Table Editor (CLUTE) from Visual Business Systems..."

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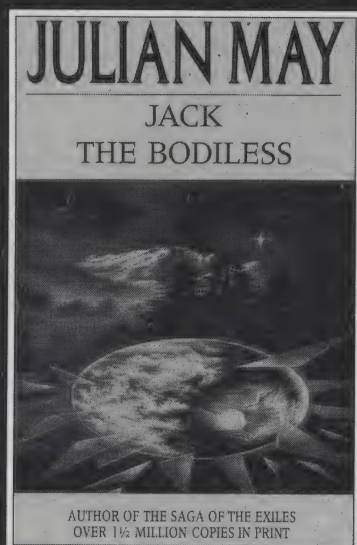
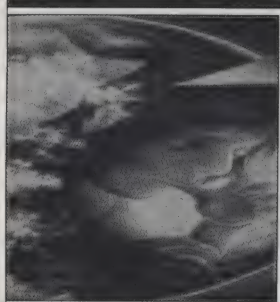
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Farm Animal

Brian Ruckley

The day opened his bright hands and in the dawn they found the man lying at the foot of the low field. He stank and his aged coat and beard were crusted with vomit. His teeth were brown pegs. His breath rattled in and out like seeds in a jar.

"Bring the donkey," said the mother, "and we'll haul him up."

Her daughter did not respond at first. She knelt, resting her fingers in the dust an inch from the man's face. His breath felt hot. She had no memory of the sight of a man.

"Bring the donkey," the old woman said again. "This is good fortune. We'll haul it up."

The donkey was a haggard beast, a boneyard wrapped in hide, but it dragged the man up the track to the house. The man did not stir, even when he slid into a pot-hole, jarring the donkey briefly to a halt.

"What's wrong with him?" the daughter asked.

Her mother spat into the dirt. She was slower even than a burdened, starving donkey and followed behind.

"What does that matter?" she said. "He is here. That is good fortune."

So good fortune was hauled up to the door of their shack like a fish pulled from the sea and lay stretched out on the bare earth while the daughter went for water.

The mother sat through the day in the door of the shack while the sun burned its arc across the sky. She sent her daughter to pick the maize that was dying in the high field and to see if the hens had laid, though they never did, and to feed the last pig. And each time the daughter came wearily back to the wooden shack only the little flat shadow the man cast had moved. The bucket of water sat beside the old woman's feet.

"Is he going to die?" she asked her mother.

The old woman ran her tongue over her gums as if searching for the teeth long gone. "No," she said.

"What should we do?"

"Wait. And keep him when he wakes."

When the day grew old and began to darken, the man rolled over and opened his eyes. "Give him water," the mother said, not moving from her chair.

The daughter brought a ladle from the bucket to the man's lips, but he pushed her hand away and coughed. He brought up phlegm into his mouth and turned his head to spit it onto the ground where it lay like the trail of a slug. He sat up and wiped his mouth

with the back of his hand, then took the ladle from the girl without looking at her face.

"Kill a chicken," said the mother. "We'll eat well, we three."

The daughter went for the axe, looking back over her shoulder. The man watched her now as she walked away.

The chicken was roasted and the man did not speak, but ate like a dog. They sat around the table; around the candle burning at its centre. Outside the night exhaled and sent her hot, light breath in through the door to shiver the flame.

"It is good fortune that you are here," said the mother as she picked tiny pieces of flesh from a leg bone to swallow whole. The man did not respond. Chicken fat was congealing in his beard.

"We have straw," said the mother, "but only a donkey can live on straw. We have chickens and a pig, but the chickens may lay and if we kill the pig we will need another before long. We have a field of maize, but it is dying of thirst and the girl cannot bring it in alone. We have a well, but it dries and the girl is too weak to dig another."

The man regarded her from beneath his thick eyebrows and rubbed the side of his nose, leaving a greasy streak on his face. The daughter did not look at the man for fear that his red-rimmed eyes might meet her own. She stared at the wavering candle flame that shone so brightly now. The man stripped tendons and nerves from the bone with his ragged rotten teeth.

"Fetch a bottle," said the mother, and her daughter went obediently to the shelf where the bottles stood. Their contents seemed to stir viscously in the flickering light. She brought one down to the table and the old woman tried to pull the cork from it, but her crooked hands would not grasp. She pushed it across to the man. He unsealed it and swallowed a mouthful, and that seemed to please him.

"Waited on the shelf for fifteen years," said the mother.

The man drank again and drew his sleeve across his mouth.

Outside, somewhere quite close, an owl began to call. The night was quivering the treetops with her faint breath and they murmured at the edge of the girl's hearing. She went to the door and walked out across the earth; it was still warm from the sun's gaze. She went down to the little barn, her mother's voice fading behind her until she could not hear the words.

The owl was singing from the wood behind the barn. It did not pause, did not miss a note, as she came softly closer. She stood on the brink of the wood. Then, abruptly, the bird fell silent and only the treetops and a few far crickets were left. The girl waited a little.

She heard the man's feet and rough breathing as he came down from the house, and she slipped into the darker space behind the barn. She trod delicately and could hear him cough and spit and start to piss against the building. The timber rattled beneath the stream of his urine. She made her way along the far side of the barn until she could see the door of the house, faintly illuminated from within. The sound of the man urinating had stopped now. It seemed for a moment that the light from the doorway dimmed a little, as if her mother might have passed before the candle's flame, and the girl stepped out from the black place by the barn's wall. She had taken two paces when she felt the man's hand upon her arm, quite light, and she turned to meet his eyes. But she could not see them. He was no more than a shape, whose breath was heavy with alcohol.

"What?" she asked.

He did not speak, but moved her toward the barn door. The touch of his hand on her arm seemed still so light; it might have been by will alone that he compelled her into the barn.

"What?" she said more loudly.

He turned her about and pushed her onto the great pile of straw that fed only the donkey. She started to shout, but his hand was hard on her neck and forcing her face down so that as she drew breath splinters of straw stung the back of her throat and the air she sucked in seemed so heavy with must that she might choke. The man threw her skirts up over her back and she tried to pull his hand from her neck but could not, so like stone had it now become.

He drove into her and she did not feel anything but the brittle strands of straw crushed in her hands. He drove into her and she tasted nothing but the dust of dead grass in her mouth. He drove into her and she heard nothing but the soft movement of tiny beasts somewhere deep beneath her in the heart of the mountain of straw to which she clung as if to a rock in a flood.

Afterward, she went up to the house. She left the man lying on the straw, drawn deep into sleep. The door of the farmhouse still stood open, but the candle had guttered and failed so that in entering she went only from darkness to deeper shadow. She found that her mother had not moved from her place at the table; might not have drawn breath since the daughter went out, might have been carved from the same hard wood as the chair. The girl sat on the floor and held her mother's knees.

"What, then?" said the old woman after an acre of silence.

But the daughter was biting her lip and her mouth was locked.

"A man is a beast," said her mother. "A simple beast, easily snared. He will stay a while now and draw life up out of this earth for us."

"I don't want him to stay," she said in a voice so faint the thick night air might have drowned it.

And the older woman grunted.

"It is the oldest contract. He will labour here and blister his hands and crack his back and you will keep him. He will not stay for me, but for you he might stay a while. That is good fortune."

The girl's stomach was all hollowness.

"It is just as it has always been," said the mother. "The most ancient contract."

The day was all heat; he was exultant with his potency and breathed fire. The daughter hid sweating in the house. She looked out from behind the crooked shutters and saw the man bringing corn up from the low field. He brought it up and took it into the barn and went back down to the field for more. Thus he went through the morning. He shed his shirt and she saw that he bore fat in a rolling stomach and a chest that sagged like flat breasts. Hair curled down the centre of his torso, thickening as it descended, writhing into his trousers. Sweat beaded over his shoulders and back.

"Take him some water," said her mother from the porch when the day was half done.

The daughter did not reply.

"Take him some water," said her mother again.

So she took the pail down to the door of the barn, and would have left it there with the ladle, but as the man came up from the field, laden with corn, she turned and saw her mother staring out from the porch and paused at the hardness of that sight. The man scattered the maize and came to her. He raised the ladle to his cracked lips, and his eyes did not falter from her face. The first mouthful he worked about his teeth and tongue and sprayed out onto the earth at her feet. She went up to the house then, and her mother's gaze was like a wind she walked into. The man's eyes were as heavy upon her back as a full sack.

In the afternoon he went to start digging a new well, and though he could not be seen from the house, the sounds of his labours came up and in through the windows on the still, still air. Her mother sent the girl to see if the chickens had laid, but there were no eggs.

Later, the old woman sat on the porch and the girl stood by her. They watched as the man came up from the field in the rusting light of the day's last hour. He carried his shirt and the shovel over his shoulder. His head was down.

"Is he my father?" asked the girl.

"Stupid. Your father's long gravied. Deep buried."

"Where?"

"Here. Deep down."

"Is this how it was with my father?"

"Fool," was all her mother said.

They ate corn that night. The girl scraped it from the cob and crushed it so that her mother could ease it past her toothless gums. The man gnawed. He took a bottle from the shelf. The daughter went to the little room where she slept. In other times it had been a food store but now held only the straw mattress she lay on. She tried to conjure herself at once into sleep but but was betrayed by her ears, straining wakefully for the smallest sound from the room beyond where the old woman and man sat at the table. She heard nothing save the song of insects humming through the thin walls of the house.

In a short time the man came and her little room

was filled with his sweat and alcohol. He lay on her and held her wrists against the floor and breathed on her face. When she turned her head to the side, his beard rasped her cheek and his tongue ran along the ridge of her jaw and sought wetly for her ear. She closed her eyes and could almost see her mother sitting quite still and silent in her chair with the naked corn cobs lying like bones on the table.

Outside, the night laid her cool soothing hand on the earth. Inside, the little room where she was pressed to the floor seemed to the daughter as hot and closed as a baking oven.

And so it went. The donkey died, but the corn and turnips came into the barn, the chickens grew less skeletal, the pig in the pen behind the house grew fatter. The well descended, the bottles on the shelf slowly emptied, the mother sat. The contract unfurled itself over the remorseless cycle of day and night. And through it all the day grew more ferocious in his heat and sucked at the earth until it had no more water to give and then blew it away in little clouds of dust on scalding winds.

The man dug, and each day they drew dark water from the foot of his well. But each sunrise saw the well dry. There was no more to be harvested, but always there was deeper to dig. The day bled into the night, so that the sun's heat seemed to linger on in the air long after it had gone, and sleep became a turbulent thing.

The girl was naked in her little room, looking out upon the silvered night, her arms across her breasts. She had dreamed of her mother and a long-armed, blank-faced man who clutched the crooked woman to his chest. It seemed that the air outside was charged with potency. The girl felt change stirring deep down in her stomach, turning, coiling and uncoiling like a living thing.

"Be glad men are beasts," the mother told her daughter. "Be glad of that. So easily are they caught."

The girl was scrubbing corn in the kitchen, staring out through the window at the pig that scuffled about behind the wire of its pen.

"It's not the man who is made beast by this contract," she said.

"Do not talk so!" snapped the mother. "Will you bring in all the crop? Will you dig the well so deep that water fills it even in these hot times? Should we have killed our last pig and all our chickens and eaten straw? This is the contract a man is drawn to and held by. How else can it be?"

"He gives nothing but his sweat," cried the daughter. "I give far more. You do not know."

"I gave through many years," said her mother, "and took. You do not know the shape of these things. Now you are learning. This is how it has always been."

"No. There are other places than this."

"Fool."

"I do not want this contract. It hurts me. I would as soon go hungry."

Her mother lashed her with a look that made her quail, yet the girl found it within herself to say, "You do not know everything."

The old woman grunted. "And what do you know? Nothing."

The track was a fragile thing, no more than a hint of usage that headed away from the edge of the farm through the scrub. Close by the place where they had found the man that other morning, the girl stood and looked out. Never had she stepped beyond this, beyond the intangible boundary of the farm. This had always been to her the end of the track, its destination and sinkhole. Now she felt the fluttering, uneasy brush of a new thought: that this place might be its beginning, that the track might be not arriving but leaving.

A thread of smoke or shadow drifted across the corner of her eye like a shiver of the heavy air. Turning, looking, she could not catch it clearly, yet it was there, wafting up out of the edge of the scrub a few yards away. It seemed to thread its way up toward the farmhouse as if carried on a breeze. She stepped forward, each pace careful. The dry ditch where the man had lain was at her back, tugging at her, whispering that she should turn and look for the imprint of his body that might still be there pressed into the yellow grass and dust. Instead she reached forward and bent aside the whippy branch of a tree.

There was the source and anchor of the wispy trail that stained the air: a seething ant-hill so alive with insects it might have been a single, hunched creature. Hundreds and thousands of the ants had emerged, laden with wings, and now took flight in a weavy mating dance that led them off and up, into the farm.

The ant-hill was a long, low, narrow mound of dead grass, twigs and browned pine needles. In shape and size it might have been a bed drawn together by some weary traveller. The girl noticed at its far end a bone-gray branch thrust into the ground, with a tatter of rotted rope hanging from it. The shorter crosspiece it might once have held lay at its foot, and the girl saw that the hill had another, darker shape than that of a bed.

She felt fear in her throat and turned, letting the frond fall back across the sight. Two steps brought her to the little patch of dry earth where the man's head had lain, blowing hot breath onto her fingers. There was no memory of his presence in the dust, no sign. The girl ran back up to the farmhouse and hid, holding herself in her room.

One evening the man climbed out of his well and cast his shovel down on the porch and went in to the shelf where the bottles were and drank one down.

"Kill a chicken," the old woman told her daughter.

So the girl went to the chicken hut and took a chicken and cut off its head with a cleaver. She held on to its legs until it stilled. She sat by her mother on the porch pulling the feathers from its skin.

When they ate, the man was drunk, and dropped the bones on the floor. He scratched his beard and coughed thickly. There was a sultry breeze in the trees that night. The air moved leadenly about. The man wove his way to the door and leant against its frame for a moment before lurching out, clutching a bottle in his stony hand. He was gone for some time.

"I cannot breathe this air," said the old woman.

The girl was collecting the chicken bones.

"Go out to him," said her mother.

"I won't," said the girl, and the night rattled the shutters.

"You will," said her mother. "He must dig the well."

"I won't. I'll go away. I'll leave."

"Stupid girl. Where would you go? You know nothing of the world. It would wound you and hurt you and drive you back. We have always been here, on this farm. This is all we have. Go to him. He must dig deeper."

"He's dug enough for me," said the girl, and the night blew dust in through the door.

"When the well is done, there is ploughing and sowing. You do not know what is deep enough."

"I'll not keep this contract for you," said the daughter, and went into the doorway. The night breathed on her face and it was a warm and intimate caress.

"Not for me," snapped her mother. "For us."

"I'll not be made the beast he is and you would have me be. I am not you nor he my father."

"Evil child!" cried the old woman and raised herself from the chair so that the girl heard her joints grinding. "Your father's deep-graved. You know nothing of him."

"I know he's not deep enough," said the girl, "and I know the well will never be finished. But it is your well, not mine."

She went out into the night's rough embrace. The trees were lashed. Clouds rushed across the stars as if swept by a flood. It seemed that the night's strength might lift the girl up, and she turned about with her arms outreached.

The man came around from behind the farmhouse, lurching and staggering. He came fast toward her, his arms hanging limp like broken boughs. The bottle hung still from his hand. She stood for a moment and looked at him as if he were a waking dream rushing up out of sleep. But he was hard and knocked her back, though he could not grasp her in his drunkenness. She fell, and he fell on her, his face in her stomach, his empty hand fumbling to grip her arm. The night roared anger in her ears and she beat at his head.

"No!" she shouted.

And she threw him off and stood up. He rose too, heavily as if clinging vines entangled his arms and legs, and reached out for her. She slapped his hand aside. The night shook herself and the wind rose. Over the man's shoulder as he came toward her the girl saw her mother standing in the doorway of the house, defined by the dancing candlelight at her back. She looked like old age. Then the night snatched away the flame of the candle and the shape of her mother blinked out.

The girl reached the barn, stepping carefully backwards until she touched its rough wooden flanks. The man was stumbling towards her through the storm. He lurched up and pressed her against the barn. She felt his brown teeth briefly, lightly on her neck, then pushed him away and said again: "No."

There was a ladder that crept up the side of the barn, as frail and brittle as chicken bones. But she was light now, in that jubilant night, and her feet brushed the rungs no more heavily than wings. The man could not follow, for he could be no lighter than his weight,

and the ladder splintered and parted behind her as he clutched at it.

And as the girl stood upright on the roof of the barn she felt and tasted the rain that came down out of the roiling clouds. Beneath her, the man pounded the walls of the barn. The bottle broke. The rain spouted in cascades from the gutters of the roof.

The night spun her way madly about the farm, and the girl laughed, the sound rising up from somewhere deep, and she shouted: "No." She felt a strength inside her flinging the word out, and it grew and thrashed like a snake in her belly. She and the night swept the earth with rain and flung out arms of lightning. She stood atop the barn, steady in the storm, and shouted again and heard the echoes of her voice crash in the thunder. Water poured over her head and face and into her mouth so that her laughter bubbled.

And now the farm was arrayed beneath her and through the lens of the rain she saw, illuminated by lightning, each thing and every thing. Her mother still there in the doorway, so fragile that she must clutch the frame with her two withered hands. The man, arms outstretched, raging between barn and house, the earth turning to mud and torrents beneath his feet. The pig in its ramshackle pen and the chicken house bowing beneath the weight of the water. Each spear of light shook the ground and exposed another step in the dance to her sight. The man thrashed and flailed and reeled about the farm and slid and fell once, twice. She saw a beast in the mud, and knew it for true sight.

And he went like a falling tree to the pig's pen and she saw him tearing open its wire door. The sow ran about howling, but the man took it and held it. Made white statues by the lightning, she saw man and pig joined, his great white buttocks shivering as he thrust himself again and again, ever deeper into the animal. Rainwater coursed, sheeting down over them and splashing in his crumpled trousers that lay in the mud about his ankles.

The girl smiled then, for she was the flashing night and she felt potent. She said, "Yes," since it seemed that things had come true and right. And it was a weighty, powerful word.

She slept in the barn that night, curled in the straw. The day that followed was cool, dripping and quiet. She trod softly up toward the farmhouse, drawing her feet through the little pools, squeezing the mud between her toes. She found her mother sitting at the end of the porch, looking out towards the pig pen. The old woman was smaller now, as fragile as a bundle of twigs. She looked at her daughter as she drew near, and then turned sadly back toward the wire-mesh pen.

The young woman saw there the sow, standing up against the wire, looking blankly at the open door of its pen. And lying beside it was not the man but a second, greater pig: a pale and hairy boar. Its flanks rose and fell slowly, gently shifting the man's clothes that it lay within. Its huge cloven feet twitched faintly, as if stormy dreams troubled its sleep.

"What is it you have done?" said the mother in a little voice.

"Learned what you taught so roughly," said the

young woman. "I have found my own eyes now. My sight is clearer."

Her mother shook her head miserably and stared at the fallen door of the pig pen.

"What will we do?" she asked.

Her daughter stretched, arching her back and reaching up with her arms.

"I shall go away," she said. "There are other places to go now. Other things to see. You can come if you want to."

The chickens were clucking in their coop. The fat boar snorted in its slumber, its wiry hair quivering. The hot breath from its great nostrils blew gullies in the mud.

"But first," said the daughter, running strong hands through her hair and fingering out flakes of straw, "we must grasp this good fortune that the night has washed up for us. We will eat well tonight, just you and I. A tender roast. Fetch the axe."

Brian Ruckley is a new British writer who lives in Northampton. As far as we know, the above is his first published short story.

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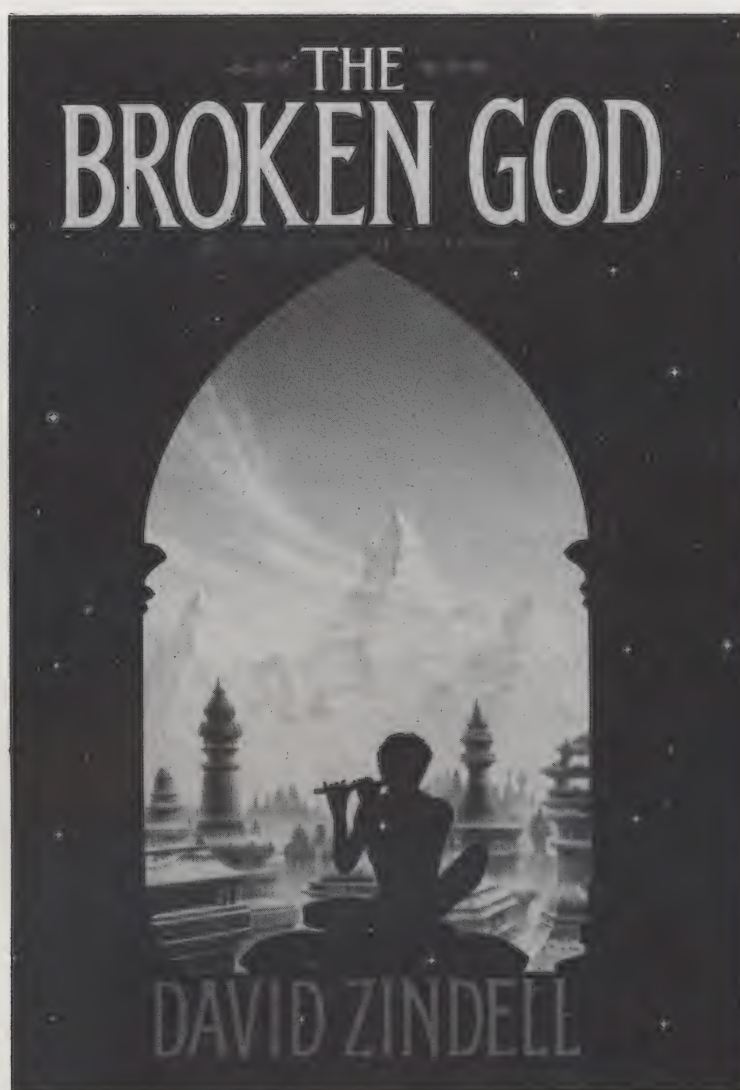
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Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

Come with us now on a voyage to distant times and faraway places: back, back, deep into the childhood of the world, to mythical lands that never were except in the imagination... Close eyes, and picture a world where magic still works: where innocence and enchantment walk hand-in-paw, and where bitter-hearted cynics and cold-headed realists put off their chitinous carapaces of doubt as they surrender to the memory of a vanished time when feelings and values were simple and true. So join us now, as we journey beyond time and space on a pilgrimage to *The Land Where Everything Is Made Exactly Like They Used To*: where there's pancakes for breakfast, warm and thick with lashings of extra syrup, and the peanut butter needs stirring; where the toyshop's full of die-cast, and Michael Miles is still on the black-and-white. (Kennedy was shot during *Take Your Pick*, you know. I can't think why this isn't more widely recorded.) For this afternoon we've got a double bill at the Cinerama for all ages, with those strangely-branded rather nasty sweets they don't sell anywhere else and a reel of Pearl & Deans introduced by a pair of Ionic columns and baba baba baba bababa, and it's continuous performances with nobody to turf you out. So all aboard the Old Tyme Feelgood Special, and don't let your waxpaper-wrapped wafer-block drip on the seat, as we

re-live those implanted movie memories of a world as it was before the fall.

And it truly is difficult, watching the quiet triumph of sentimental craftsmanship that is *Groundhog Day*, to see why most film entertainment in the nineties is incapable of matching this kind of old-fashioned unassuming knack for getting it more-or-less completely right. There's nothing remotely special about any of the elements in the package: the talent is all respectable mid-range, the laughs adequate but firmly this side of rupturous, and the stuck-in-a-ghastly-day-timeloop premise bold and inventive only in Hollywood. (The *locus classicus*, Aldiss's "Not for an Age," dates from 1955.) Even the movie's nostalgic apotheosis of folksy smalltown living, and of the cinema tradition that enshrined it, is as cheerfully fake as it is undisguised, and the surpriseless finale delivers no goods that haven't been advertised a full hour in advance. It is, to be sure, consistently well-made, particularly in the care taken over and by its large supporting cast of amiable 2D hicks; and writer Rubin, director Ramis, and star Murray all put in easily the best work of their hitherto unenthralled careers. Yet the emotions, however attractively rendered, are still straight off a numbered palette, and filled in from charts available from all good stockists. It's not in

any of these departments, I think, that the uniqueness of this film's remarkable achievement lies.

What *Groundhog Day* does quite uncannily well, and indeed handles better than any high-concept comedy in current memory, is rather its conceptual *followthrough*. We've long been trained to take it pretty much for granted that Hollywood's standard approach to a good idea is to waste it. Indeed, commercial logic makes this positively desirable. The function of high concept is traditionally to get people into the theatre; it's not normally up to the additional task of keeping them entertained for 110 minutes once they're inside, when different kinds of mechanism tend to kick in. A concept is a hook, a launch-pad, or at best a machine for generating a few situations and set pieces. To devote a whole film to working through successive entailments of its premise has come to seem unduly fussy and taxing, quite aside from making it extraordinarily difficult to pass unimpaired through the notoriously formula-sensitive production process. People are perfectly happy not to apply the same standards of logic and consistency to an sf movie as they would to an sf magazine story, and given the need to accommodate the straiter demands of conventional popular-cinema narrative form it seems needless to ball-and-chain a project to the chimerical ambition of doing justice to its ideas.

And yet *Groundhog Day* ignores all received wisdom to do just that, its plot traversing a careful unilinear chain of consequences out of its initial thought-experiment, as Murray works through a seven-step program of successive response strategies to his paradoxical predicament. (i) Being trapped in a cycle of *déjà vu* is initially just weird, disorienting, and full of zany Bergsonian comic opportunities. (ii) But if everything you do resets to zero at the end of the day, you can progress to amusing yourself and your audience by fulfilling all your darkest criminal urges with perfect impunity. (In Bill's case, fortunately, such urges run only to genteel carchases, over-indulgence in saturated fats and



Andie McDowell & Bill Murray in 'Groundhog Day'

Jimmy Beam, and some mild emotional manipulation of the sexually vulnerable for private fleshly reward – no impulse whatever, apparently, to dangerous drug experiments, sexual perversion, or the infliction of any kind of pain, which must make him one of the easiest candidates for redemption in the history of sin.) (iii) But alas, the moment you make the inevitable, fatal movie mistake of actually caring about something – even some dippy Andie MacDowell type who insists on drinking to “World Peace” – your carefully-honed seduction techniques backfire horribly and the need to renegotiate all relationships daily from scratch becomes curse rather than blessing. (iv) So in Act 2 you turn from grudging acceptance to desperate thoughts of escape, and experiment with death in a series of irrepressibly hilarifying cork-poppers. (v) But of course the terms of the experiment forbid even this exit, so you veer instead to delusions of godhead and testing the range of your powers, until (vi) the dippy female is forced to take you seriously owing to your display of miraculous mental abilities, and forces you to re-examine your strategy from scratch. (NB chaps: the secret of getting infinitely desirable women into your sheets is NOT to find out exactly what she wants in a man and then give her same in every detail, but to take her to a donut shop and convince her you’re trapped in a timeloop. Happy scoring!) (vii) So you need to abandon your solipsistic world-model and think instead about ensuring that all the little quantum universes that go spinning off daily on every side get the best starts they possibly can, even if you’re not going to be along for the ride. So, give cash to the homeless! Develop a professional attitude to your work! Learn to play the piano! Master the Heimlich manoeuvre! Buy insurance you’ll never need! You’ll be astonished, if not exactly surprised, at the uplifting results.

The trick is, there’s a lot more payoff to this than simply the intellectual satisfaction of a premise well worked through. While Murray’s path of personal growth from lovable grouch to perfect self-realization through involvement with community projects is pretty textbook stuff, by Hollywood standards it’s an unusually long and smoothly-plotted emotional curve. Not many movies – least of all comedies – require their hero to do as many as seven different mood states, let alone assemble them into a carefully-graduated learning progression. Normally your hero is just supposed to spend Act 1 getting involved, Act 2 getting bumped about, and Act 3 getting it together. Murray, by contrast, has to go through the whole karmic cycle of movie rebirth in each successive act,



Cathy Moriarty in 'Matinee'

each time spiralling a little closer to nirvana and redemptive release. It's impossible not to feel you're getting enormous value for your ticket from all this. If you do find yourself wondering what happens to the dead hobo, what exactly the onomastic hints of a mystic twinning between man and native American rodent have to do with anything else whatever, and above all why the silly tosser never tries staying up all night, getting out at dawn before the blizzard, or [this space left blank for your own message], it's perhaps because for once you're confronted with a scenario that almost, almost stands up to this kind of examination, and with a vehicle that satisfies on so many more immediate levels that such questions really do for once seem pretty immaterial. It's not faultless, but it's the kind of story that wouldn't have shamed an average 1956 issue of *Galaxy*, than which there is, for Hollywood, no higher praise.

They've lost much of the struggle to edit the dozens of tiny plot fibrils coherently; to grace the ending with dialogue that doesn't sound straight

off a greetings card ("No matter what happens tomorrow, or for the rest of my life, I'm happy now, because I love you," followed by "Do you know what today is? Today is tomorrow!"); and to find ways of telegraphing the moral dialectic for the benefit of slower members of the audience. ("Let me ask you guys a question," pipes up Murray in mid-mayhem-escapade: "What if there were no tomorrow?" "That," obliges First Drunk with unprecedented lucidity, "would mean there would be NO CONSEQUENCES – we could do WHATEVER WE WANTED!") But in a sense all this stuff is red herrings anyway, because the deep fantasy is nothing to do with moral hypotheticals or time paradoxes at all. *Groundhog Day* is quite nakedly a film about other and older films, and its driving question is *what if life really were like the movies?* – if you could do as many takes as you like to get a scene right, and none of it really mattered; if, instead of having to go through life in one long take and script all your lines by improv, you could try out successive rewrites on the scenes that matter,

test them on your target audience, and edit out the ones that don't play well; if women, moreover, really could tell men exactly what they wanted in a itemized checklist; above all, if fortune-cookie philosophy about today being the first day of the rest of your life actually were the summit of wisdom and truth, Punxsutawney PA (where it's not in fact even shot) really was some gigantic Frank Capra memorial theme park, and it really was, after all, a wonderful life.

Much less smooth, but a lot harder-edged, and with individual spikes on the hilarity curve that go way off the *Groundhog Day* scale, is Joe Dante's take on a similar agenda in *Matinee*. For Dante, too, the quest for value in a world starved of innocence leads nostalgically back to a golden era of moviegoing. But this time the dialogue between screen dreams and life is much more overt, political, and perverse. For where *Groundhog Day*'s nostalgia is for smalltown life and its mythicization on screen, *Matinee* looks back to a golden age of fear: the real-life apocalyptic terror of the Cuban missile crisis, as experienced by the families of mobilized US Navy men back in frontline Key West, and the fabricated terrors of the great age of monster cheapies, as served up by John Goodman's magnificently larger-than-life composite of Corman, Hitchcock, and Castle in one gigantic personality. In Dante's bizarre morph of *Atomic Cafe* with 1941, the world teeters on the brink of a nuclear armageddon whose horrors not even the prepared have adequately imagined, and it turns for catharsis to Goodman's daft kitchen-sink Frankenmovie of every inexpensive monster pic and every absurd promotional gimmick and every novelty process that the age and its heroes ever produced. A deeply, even embarrassingly, moral film, it's simultaneously an elegiac evocation of the dying glories of a cinematic era when fear could still be innocent; a passionate defence of exploitation cinema then and now as culturally, psychologically, and even ethically necessary; and an ironic reflection on the twin absurdities of a world that responds to fantasized terrors with misplaced earnestness, and to real terrors with self-deluding fantasy.

Well, this is overreach on a heroic scale, and it's not surprising that a fair amount of it sputters and misfires. Whether or not Castle and Castro really belong in the same film (which of course is exactly the provocation posed), it's bound to be wondered whether Dante's the ideal director to reconcile them, given that bittersweet coming-of-age period political fable isn't traditionally one of his native registers. The actual plot is badly underweight (especially at the climax),

the teenage leads much less engaging than the adult supports, and the real-world tension terminally undermined by the audience's knowledge that the nuclear world war the characters fear is never in fact going to materialize. *Matinee*'s at its sharpest in the period caricature of bomb-culture manners, the duck-and-cover, fallout-shelter-in-the-basement approach to surviving the unsurvivable; and at its funniest in the gleefully inauthentic movie-within-a-movie, brimming with cheap laughs, trainspotterly in-jokes, and impossibly anachronistic and unaffordable special effects. Goodman is one long treat, Cathy Moriarty sends up her regular character to fine effect, and the opening sequence knocks comedic spots off anything else all year (and, unfortunately, off everything that follows it). Yet there are also, just occasionally, moments of alarming wisdom about movies and life that come perilously close to profundity (the cave-painting monologue, or Goodman's parting advice to the hero: "Grownups are making it up as they go along, just like you do"). And throughout, the poignant intimations of an end of innocence looming – the failing struggle of movies against TV, the falling shadows of Vietnam and Dealey Plaza, the film-nerd hero's initiation into the new political and sexual consciousness that will define his generation to history – offer glimpses of a less comfortable world to come. "They've seen the coming attractions," is Goodman's portentous closing verdict on the next crop of adults; and "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" is prematurely drowned in the kind of terrible off-the-peg endtitle music that says Leave this theatre NOW. For the matinee's over, there's nobody in the booth, and already it's dark outside.

(Nick Lowe)

Back Issues

Stocks of issues 20 and 21 have now run out, so we have to add them to the growing list of out-of-print *Interzones*.

All other back issues (i.e. apart from numbers 1, 5, 6, 7, 17, 20, 21, 22 and 23) are still available at £2.50 each (£2.80 or \$5 overseas) from the address on page 3.

Interzone

Some back-issue highlights:

No.29: "Sex Wars" issue; stories by Greg Egan, Karen Joy Fowler, Garry Kilworth, etc.

No.32: Richard Calder's debut, "Mosquito," plus fiction by Barry Bayley, Ian McDonald

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No.48: All-star "Aboriginal" swap issue, with Brown, Egan, Griffith, McAuley, etc.

No.50: Stephen Baxter, Ian Lee & others, plus full index of first fifty issues

No.53: Fiction by Christopher Evans, Ian R. MacLeod; Jonathan Carroll interview

No.56: Ian Watson's "Coming of Vertumnus" plus Ballard, Di Filippo, Mapes, Webb, etc.

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All these issues are still in stock.

My Informant Zardon

Jamil Nasir

My informant Zardon, a private investigator in Interpenetration Universe L-2 with whom I exchange letters, sent me this report of a case he had:

I was in the Fladian Peninsula, a geological curiosity much like your Florida: a narrow spit of percolating rock through which the ocean flows with scarcely any hindrance, heavily forested above, with popular resorts along the coasts. I remember, my first or second day there, standing at the top of a wide, foot-scarred beach, the cries of children and washing of surf coming clearly through the still air. A looming haze on the horizon reached toward the land with tentacles of cloud and a faint electricity. The water was like warm, choppy glass, the more delicious because soon the storm would make the beach deserted, darkness would fall, there would be lightning, and the swimmers, sitting or lying now in rocking, gurgling water, would be cozy in their beach cottages. Up the bluff behind me, amid the cool humidity of trees, the stillness was heavy and penetrating, as if silent invisible raindrops had already begun to fall.

Days later, or earlier – in a tenuously-connected time on the event-bridge I had been travelling – I drove on a winding road over thickly forested hills, the ocean showing now and then between vine-hung branches. A long way from anywhere, I came upon a house with a yard grown so wild you couldn't tell where it ended and the woods began; ivy grew shaggily in place of a lawn, mingling at its edges with the forest leaves and overhanging the mossy retaining wall along the road. The house itself was dark, weathered brick, set so close around with huge oaks that it looked almost like a natural outcropping of rock. Brick steps led to the front door. On a middle step in the damp quiet evening the forest made of afternoon still shimmering on the ocean, I first saw the woman; eyes in evening light glistening, skin glowing faintly against the forest's slow brown and green decay, motionless, as if time had frozen, caught on the steps like a fly in amber.

I was to know her better. In a discontinuous event-time I had managed to jump to we stood on an observation walkway built over jutting rocks on an ocean mountain. Beyond the concrete parapet, leaves of a forest like a still green ocean fell away in rills and cliffs.

"I love you," I confessed in the high, dusty silence. She laughed softly.

A saying goes: "Memory is difficult, and distance truly separates." From your description, it seems

distance doesn't separate at all in your world! Here is an example: Because the woman fit the target description my client had given me, I tried to remember where I had seen her before. I seemed to remember her in Ionia, a region of gently rolling plains corresponding somewhat to your Central Midwest. The distance between the Fladian Peninsula and Ionia is uncertain, but vast. Looking at maps in our world is dizzying, like looking down from a great height; not only because the red and blue lines representing roads and railways seem to shift and meander as you study them, but because a vague racial memory warns you that discontinuities lurk in each foot of distance between two places, and that people don't always end up where they aim to go. There is a vertigo in maps.

Arriving in a little Ionian town, stricken with travelbend, I had wandered into a garden party at a local philanthropic institution. I was received kindly: people in my world have much sympathy for travelers. My bags were taken up a cool, echoing staircase, I was given a glass of pale wine and sent out to join the other guests, scattered in chattering and laughing groups about the large grounds, sitting in garden chairs under trees or lounging on blankets on yellow summer grass. The sun, high and diamond-bright, had made me sweat carrying my bags through the quiet streets from the train station, but here a breeze stirred. I felt my body relaxing, the spinning disorientation of travelbend slowing. I found myself sitting against the trunk of a big tree, a little way from a girl.

She had honey-coloured hair, eyes like green crystal, a thin, shapely body in a pale green sun dress, a pale, friendly face. She asked me: "Dew thick on the train?"

Then, with the sudden reinterpretation of sound you get when you realize you've misheard something, I knew she had actually said: "Do you think kitsch will reign?"

But that wasn't it either; my travel-addled brain gave me a dozen reinterpetative echoes.

"Um –," I said, putting a hand to my head to stop it from spinning.

She looked at me closely then.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she gasped, and put a cool, apologetic hand against my cheek.

Later, gradually, with a rising hiss and a movement of wet air, it began to rain.

I could not have predicted it, but now I realized that light and shade had slowly merged, the sky had piled up with mountainous clouds, a cool gust had blown,

and now a big drop splashed into my wine, followed by a thunder-crash.

The green-eyed girl was staring straight up, blinking her eyes and laughing.

And suddenly the air was full of rain, thick and sweet, filling me with its intoxicating smell. A cry went up from all the people, and I realized that, of course, this was *Ion*, the July thunderstorm that ends the summer drought, and of course the thunderstorm was the occasion of the party.

The green-eyed girl stood up. The rain – rushing between us like rippling bead-curtains, washing colour and light so that shifting curtains of silver seemed drawn all around, and beyond them a roar like an approaching tidal wave; gleaming with celestial light from above the clouds – the rain had wetted her sun-dress to near transparency, showing the smooth ivory shape beneath.

She took my hands and we were dancing, laughing hard in the torrent, separated from the world, whirling, splashing in mud, seeing no one, stumbling and falling, laughing harder, out of breath, her rain-cold skin friendly as my best friend's.

Dancing in the muddy street outside the gates as the rain lets up.

Pulling me by the hand through small-town streets as darkness falls, our wet clothes clammy in the chilly air, the smell of growing fields from a few blocks away where the town ends.

Creeping through the back garden of a big house in the dark, smell of tomato plants in soft earth. Pulling me through the black doorway of a half-basement, where she means for us to sleep.

But a ghost is there: a huge, man-shaped shadow moves in the blackness, moaning. We run away wildly, but I have the feeling she knows who it is, knew it would be there.

Was she the same woman I had seen in the Fladian forest? The Fladian woman's hair was curly and dark, her figure fuller, her eyes blue – but people and things are different in different times and places. Connections between events are difficult in our world, even as the events themselves stay the same.

As my investigation proceeded, I became more and more convinced she was the woman my client had sent me to find. A suppressed excitement was growing in me: if it was true, then my event-bridge – the most difficult one I had ever traced – had worked. My client had given me instructions for testing such a guess: I ran a classified advertisement for three days in obscure back-issues of a local newspaper:

Thrown from the tallest building
I would rather lie in the grave with you
Than go on seeing your ghost

On the evening of the third day, I got a note asking me to come to Shadeview.

Shadeview is a village in the central Peninsula, away from the beaches, where rich people go when they don't want to bother with anyone who isn't rich. I came there in late evening. In the centre of town was a small deserted park. The air was dark blue, heavy, still, like the air that hangs in jungles, black at the edges where the forest stood, pricked by stars and

windows. I walked silently across trimmed grass. In the centre of the park was a square holly hedge, taller than a man. Following the note's instructions, I went through an opening in it. Surrounded by the hedge was a square concrete pool, lit orange by underwater lights, filled with foot-long carnivorous fish.

I waited, and after a while someone came through another opening in the hedge. It was the woman, wearing a black leather bodysuit, orange light making shadows of her eyes. She stood just inside the opening, and a tension in her body eased.

"I knew it couldn't be him," she said softly after a minute. "But I had to see. Did he send you somehow?"

"He begs you to come back," I said. "I've found a bridge between you. I can take you over it with a high probability of success. But we must hurry: it's long and fragile; it could break up any time."

"And if I choose to stay here?"

"My instructions are that you won't."

She smiled. "Come with me."

Beyond the park a dark garden sloped up under cedars holding their clumps of leaves like nocturnal clouds. The whirring of crickets closed around us. A big house loomed. We went through a side door in an ivy-coloured wall, climbed stairs to a high-ceilinged room with sharp-edged blue-green chairs set around a huge glass dining-table. A chandelier above the table was made of blue-green bulbs with trapezoids of glass hanging on wires. Sharp metal flowers stood in vases.

The woman's boots clicked on the blue-tiled floor. Her figure was slender and hypnotic in the tight leather. I followed her into the next room.

It was dim, carpeted in fluffy white, with deep, silk-upholstered couches. Lacquered cabinets stood against flower-papered walls. A big window was open on the garden, letting in tendrils of plants, the whir of crickets, the smell of crimson night flowers. The woman was walking quickly; I had to hurry to keep up with her. The next room had walls and ceiling of black slate, a floor of white gravel, squat brass charcoal braziers in the shapes of gargoyles giving off acrid, intoxicating smoke –

Suddenly I realized that she had tricked me.

In our world, events are stable but the connections between them are unstable, the degree of instability depending on the speed at which they are traversed. If a subject moves through dissimilar events faster than a certain limiting rate, which has been precisely defined by the scientists, the connections between them "bend" (undergo continuous topological deformations), or, in extreme cases may "collapse" (undergo nonlinear discontinuous translations). In the former case, "travelbend," event-connections reassume a comprehensible shape once motion slows or ceases, though reconfigured in ways often bewildering to the poor traveller. In "event-collapse," however, the relation between pre- and post-collapse circumstances may be completely undiscoverable, except for "event-ghosts," dim reflections of previous event-configurations that often appear in the post-collapse locus.

By rushing me through these wildly different rooms, the woman was trying to overload my already travel-stretched capacity for new events, and so to escape.

"Wait!" I yelled, and ran toward where her alluring

backside was disappearing through the next doorway – too late. I barely had time to see a room of carved arches fading into a dimness of bookcases when the crushing intoxication of travelbend hit me, and my brain would no longer organize.

At one point I got a letter from my client. I had been sitting under a beach umbrella all morning. Perfect immobility and surroundings that change little are best for thinking, and I needed to think. I had been unable to speak to the woman, and time was running out: soon the tenuous and roundabout bridge I had been lucky enough to trace between her and my client would dissolve and I would never be able to get her to him. Hazy sunlight sparkled on blue water and a wet breeze blew from far ocean regions. Children squealed, and sea birds cried in their more airy voices. Around noon, a mailman in crimson uniform and fez strode along the beach yelling out the names of those who had received Express Mail, sandal-bells jingling. Of course, we have no hyper-rapid forms of communication like your “telephone” and “telegraph” – messages moving at such speeds would become incomprehensible. Letters are carried at a cautious pace inside featureless metal containers to minimize travelbend; even so, they must be interpreted with care when received. Express Mail, carried faster, is used only when urgency justifies obfuscation. I was irritated to hear the mailman calling my name: more events at this stage of the case were unneeded. I waved him over and paid him; he handed me the familiar sequined envelope.

I tore it open ready to confront confusion; still, I was astonished. It held only a dozen-year-old clipping from a northern newspaper. The headline read: MURDER SUSPECT FREED, and under it, separate photos showed my client and the Fladian woman. The story began: “A man suspected of throwing his lover from the penthouse suite of the city’s tallest building after a quarrel was released from custody today for lack of evidence, according to city prosecutors. Prosecutors told reporters that witnesses in the World Industry Centre who saw the fall of 21-year-old –”

But my eyes kept wandering up to the two photographs: my client, a huge, square-jawed man, enormously strong, enormously determined, in this picture younger, his black hair unflecked with grey; the woman dark-eyed and beautiful even in the rather fuzzy print.

In a non-contiguous event-time I first met her. I drove back to the house in the woods where I had seen her. It was night, and a single cricket creaked languidly. The air was close and still under vine-hung trees. A lit window glowed on gnarled tree-roots like lizards writhing in the thick ivy. I had to knock several times before she came to the door though she was only sitting in the next room. It was long and narrow, lit by a dim floor lamp. She sat on a couch near where gauze curtains stirred faintly in windows facing the ocean, motioned me to a chair.

Her face was half in shadow. “How may I help you, Mr –,” she consulted my card, “Zardon?”

“I’ll be very frank, Miss –”

She didn’t supply the missing name.

“I’m a private detective,” I went on. “My client is

a successful businessman in a northern city. Lately he has fallen into a deep depression, and is unable to eat or sleep. It seems an event-ghost is bothering him, the result of a tragic event-collapse that happened years ago.”

“And has this something to do with me?”

A breath through the windows brought the cool, haunting smell of jasmine, filling me suddenly with the memory of making love to her, lying in dry grass outside a little Ionian town, she gasping, her slender, strong body thrusting against me, the vertigo of travelbend singing in my head, until I felt myself falling through space, as if from a tall building.

I had never remembered that before.

“Are you all right, Mr Zardon? May I bring you a glass of water?”

The water was full and rich, as if it had soaked the roots of flowers before coming to the cracked ceramic glass she gave me. The crack, as I saw it while drinking, assumed the shape of a flower stem, graceful and lithe as her body.

I handed back the glass, wiped my mouth.

“However I pursue you, you deflect me,” I muttered.

“Why, Mr Zardon, what extraordinary things you say,” she said, sitting on the couch again, her hands cradling the glass interestedly. I don’t remember ever seeing you before. Of course, that doesn’t mean I haven’t ever.” She laughed softly, with a hint of taunting.

The moon was rising outside the window.

“Do you like to swim?” she asked suddenly. “Will you go swimming with me?”

A path ran under dark trees, through brush and coarse grass to the beach. The water was lukewarm, with restless, gentle swells, grey in the moonlight, with the faintest tint of unlit green.

“So your investigations have led to me?” she asked as the water rocked us a hundred yards from shore.

Only then did I notice the shadow that circled around and under her in the water, huge and dark and manshaped.

I swam desperately back to shore, dreading every second to feel its hands drag me down. I stood trembling on the beach.

She was a moon-ripple, coming slowly nearer, rising from the water, wet silver and ebony.

“Don’t you understand?” she hissed, barely audible over the surf. “He threw me from his office window 13 years ago. I can still feel the spinning, the roaring air tearing at my clothes, my face, the ground rushing up. But the World Industry Centre building is so tall and I fell so fast that I had acute event-collapse, and broke into a distant event-time, *alive*.”

“In his rage and arrogance he killed me in his world. In the event-times where he is alive, *I am dead*. And I will not go back, even if there is some flimsy bridge cobbled together out of events that were never meant to touch that could take me. Tell him that. Tell him we will never be anything to each other any more but event-ghosts...” She reached a hand backward at the water, where a black ripple moved unquietly.

In one part of the sky it is raining, in another part it is morning, in another part deep night. The woman leans over me, breasts taut against black

leather, shafts of yellow sunlight, raindrops, and blackness falling around her into my car. I am in the driver's seat, and she is programming the dashboard.

Her voice is soft, flutelike: "I'm sending you far away. By the time you get unbent your bridge will be gone." Her voice trembles. "I loved you once. I suppose that's why you were able to find your way to me." Crimson flower petals tremble in a breath of moonlight, stir in a dawn breeze, shake in rain.

She closes the door; the car starts away. The last thing I see is a sign saying "Shadeview City Limit."

Saluting you affectionately my friend (and waiting eagerly for more tales of your own strange world),
I am,

Sincerely yours,
Zardon.

Jamil Nasir last contributed to *Interzone* with "Not Even Ashes" (issue 31). Since then he has sold a number of stories to Asimov's, *Aboriginal*, the *Universe* anthology series and other markets. An American-Palestinian by background, and a lawyer by profession, he lives near Washington DC, where he is currently working on his first novel.

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Adding the Flesh and Blood

Jonathan Wylie interviewed by Stan Nicholls

"Jonathan Wylie" is the pseudonym of husband-and-wife writing team Mark and Julia Smith. Apart from living and writing together, they worked for over a decade as editors with publishers Transworld, occupying adjacent offices and even sharing an assistant. "You couldn't spend much more time together than we have," Mark admits, "and it's not a set-up we would universally recommend. All I can say is that it works for us."

They left Transworld in the spring of 1991 to become full-time writers. They also decided to quit London. "The last two years have seen some extraordinary changes for us," Mark comments. "But it was a decision we had to take, because the books got to the point where we had a chance of making a living out of them. We couldn't wait any longer, if you like, and we'd wanted to get out of London for quite a while, having both been there for a very long time."

They moved to what Julia describes as, "Very much the wilds of Norfolk. But it was never us thinking, 'We're going to leave London'; it was, 'We're going to Norfolk.' That was always our Holy Grail, although we didn't know the area desperately well.

"The village we moved to was chosen almost specifically because it has the worst possible communications in terms of road and rail transport. But we wanted to be in the country, and we wanted to be in a village, and it's worked out so incredibly well. The people there are really friendly without being intrusive, and very helpful when we've needed them to be.

"We adapted in about 30 seconds. It was really quite uncanny, because we thought leaving the job, and leaving all the people in the network that surrounded us, and going off into the wilds, would be a real wrench. But we were just so at home straight away."

"We did some freelance editing work for Transworld for a while after moving," Mark explains. "It meant we still had contacts with the authors and so on, and that keeps the interest going. But there have been no withdrawal symptoms from doing the job in an office environment.



Julia and Mark Smith ("Jonathan Wylie")

"Obviously one of the advantages of writing for a living is that it's something you can do anywhere. Therefore we can choose our own environment. And not only the place but also the time. That's been an absolute joy to us. You're not tied to office hours and you can write until two o'clock in the morning, if you're foolish enough to want to. You can just fit in with whatever the mood is, because there are some days when you get up and think, 'Fat chance'."

"So you go to the beach or have a walk," Julia says. "To know you can do that, and make up for it the next day when you're feeling fresher, is really liberating. I mean, when you're feeling disinclined to work you produce absolute rubbish, which gets torn up the next day. So we've evolved a system whereby we accept those days now and just go with it. It certainly makes a change from the constant noise of London and always being enclosed by buildings."

Their timing was a little out of whack, unfortunately, as Mark acknowledges. "We more or less made the decision to go just as the recession officially started. But we'd been fairly sensible about the whole thing financially. While we were still working, and with the books, we were doing

okay and able to save a bit of money, so we knew we were financially secure for a time. And it's not as if we have an extravagant lifestyle; we can exist on a relatively small amount of money should we need to. Another thing is that we've had quite a few foreign rights sales, which has been wonderful for us, because no work is involved on our part. The most recent news in that respect is that *Shadow Maze* [their last novel, published by Corgi] has been sold to the States. Del Rey are publishing it there this year."

Was that their first American sale? "The first six books were all published in America by Bantam," Mark says, "but to be perfectly honest I don't think they did terribly well. So we didn't have a particularly good track record there. Our track record in the British market is much better. But we're very happy to be with Del Rey now because it's always been a company with a really good feel for fantasy."

"And our output has gone up since we went to Norfolk," Julia interjects. "When we were editing and writing we did a book every nine months. Now it's every six months. When we moved it was quite good for us I think because we had *Shadow Maze* on the go and knew we wanted to finish it by a

certain time after moving. It got us into working in a new environment.

"Although I have to admit we took most of the summer off before we really got back down to things. But since we've started again we've written the first book in a new trilogy and just started on the second. It only took us six months on the first one, so hopefully that's the sort of time scale we're looking at, if we're writing the same sort of sized books, or type of books. Having said that, we're hoping that at some point in the future we'll be able to go into slightly different areas. Then it may well take us a lot longer to produce something."

Julia began reading fantasy and sf in her teens. Mark didn't read much of it until university. "I wish now that I had," he says, "but my interest really started when I discovered people like Mervyn Peake and Tolkien, and that interest has stayed with me."

"We started writing in a fairly light-hearted vein," Mark adds. "We had been reading a lot of fantasy, and eventually got to the point where we said, 'Why don't we have a go at this?' We'd both harboured ambitions to write before we were together, but neither of us produced anything even vaguely proficient."

"What we were doing, when we began to write together, was taking ideas that cropped up in quite a lot of fantasy and trying to turn them on their heads. Being stock situations they were ripe for a certain amount of humorous treatment. We quickly discovered that this was a great deal of fun, and it's remained a great deal of fun. What we didn't realize of course was how much hard work it involved!

"There are a lot of fantasy novels which reviewers in particular complain are all the same, and there's a certain amount of justification in that. On the other hand the basic framework of most fantasy leaves so much scope for individual expression it doesn't mean the overall form is invalid. You can still use that form."

"Basically we wanted to write something we would like to read. The first trilogy had kings, swords and dragons, so in a lot of respects the elements were fairly traditional, but I hope that we, as Jonathan Wylie, have a sufficiently individual voice to make it worthwhile."

Who does what in their collaborations? "The first stage is that we both come up with various ideas," Julia explains. "Then we sort of knit those together into a rough outline, a very basic plot structure. The next stage is working it out chapter by chapter, but very loosely, just in a few lines. It goes on from there in various stages, the main one being us sitting down at the table talking to each other and making

copious notes. By the end of that we usually have around four pages of notes for each chapter."

"It's a sequence of processes which up to a certain point are all done collaboratively," Mark says. "As Julia said, we bounce ideas off each other to start with, and it gets more and more refined until we get to the point where we begin to write our first draft. One or other of us will do that and the other one will in effect edit it. Then we sit down together again and go through it. We have queries about certain things at that point and come to a solution about them we're both happy with."

"You can get yourself into a corner and just not see a way out of it. If you were on your own you could stay at that point for days and not get anywhere. But in a collaboration you can turn to the other person and say, 'What am I going to do?' And the answer's there so many times. It's just instant, without even thinking about it. Then it seems obvious, of course."

"That's one aspect of it," Julia agrees. "I suppose the other is the quality of the ideas that are generated because there are two of you. You start with something very simple from one of us and then the other one will say, 'Yes, but what if you added this?' It goes backwards and forwards and you can end up with something vastly more interesting and complicated than the original idea, and which you never would have got to alone."

Who arbitrates if a disagreement arises? "We do have minor disagreements, on an odd word, the construction of a sentence or something. If either of us feels very strongly about the direction of it, or the structure of a chapter or the way something is going, the other will usually bow to that feeling."

"We've got to the stage," Mark points out, "where writing together now is an entirely natural process for us. We know a lot of people, other authors included, who can't imagine how we do it. It's exactly the reverse for us; we would consider it quite a frightening prospect to write something individually. We've been working together now for about nine years, and I think our styles have melded, in the same way our lives have melded. We have a nice balance in that we have a lot in common, but we have enough differences both in our interests and our personalities to vary it."

In *Shadow Maze* there are two central characters who share the same aims and ideals despite having quite differing outlooks on life. Is there any kind of autobiographical element here? "We were talking to a friend about *Shadow Maze* recently and she said she can see so much of us in it," Julia says, "and our other books, in the way we are and the way we think."

"One of the most obvious examples of this kind of thing is children. We don't have any children in *Shadow Maze* – I think it's the first book where we haven't – but in all the others there are children who are loved but at a distance. Because we have nieces and nephews but we don't have our own family."

"There are obviously elements of us in lots of the characters," Mark says. "That particular relationship [in *Shadow Maze*] was totally subconscious; we never thought of it like that. We simply wanted those characters to be different from each other; the whole point was that they reacted to situations and lived their lives in quite diverse ways."

"But there are a lot of things – our attitudes and philosophies, if you like – that come through in certain aspects of our characters. There are conscious elements too, of course, because you actually take a character and model them. But an awful lot comes through without you thinking about it. It's been pointed out to us that we have ecological concerns in our books, for example. The phrase one reviewer used was 'Strange environmental...'

"...disasters as a recurring theme',” completes Julia. "Which we'd never realized until somebody pointed it out to us. But when it was pointed out it was obvious."

"There are certain things you want a book to deal with when you start writing it," Mark continues. "But mostly they get developed while the actual writing is going on. In *Shadow Maze*, for instance, there's the running motif of light, in all its different forms. That started off being completely unconscious, but when we became aware of it we worked deliberately to develop it in certain places."

The Smiths have ideas and ambitions for books outside fantasy, but they have no intention of moving away from the genre entirely. "Going into fantasy in the first place was a completely natural decision," Mark recalls, "in that it was an area where we were both knowledgeable. But more importantly, we had the interest. We enjoyed it."

"You basically write the kind of books you like to read, and this is the area we're most fascinated by. Also, in general terms, fantasy is a genre that's not limited. There are conventions, but you can stick with them or ignore them as you choose. There are recurring themes in fantasy, the quest and so on, but you can take those or you can leave them. Then again, you can take them and try to subvert them in some way. You're only limited by your imagination, and if something you've written isn't interesting, it's down to you."

"With fantasy, you can go as far as

you are capable of taking it, whereas lots of other forms of writing can constrict you. If you're trying to write something set in the present day, there are certain things that are there and you cannot change if you want to be realistic about it. Okay, you could try to invent a London where the Houses of Parliament didn't exist, for example, but that would no longer be a realistic novel. Whereas fantasy, especially the sort we write, which is set in imaginary worlds, rather than this one with an alternate history or whatever, really has no limitations.

"One of the things we like about fantasy as opposed to science fiction – and this is talking in very broad terms because the gap between the two has become terribly vague – is that fantasy seems so much more concerned with people, with characters; whereas science fiction tends to be concerned with hardware and technology."

Yet there are hints, such as a 15-month year, that indicates the world in which *Shadow Maze* takes place isn't Earth. "Yes, but that doesn't make it science fiction," Mark states. "We just wanted to get in a system of time and various other things that were deliberately different. It seemed to us that when you're writing about an imaginary world there are certain things that should be different to this world. You cannot for instance talk about weeks, because a week isn't necessarily going to mean anything in the culture you've created. So we wanted some way of specifying a time scale, things like days or months, which have actual astronomical references. A day is a day; it's light and it's dark, and a month is the cycle of the moon. But a week has no meaning at all, except the one Humanity has invented for it. We wanted a scale of time which was more than a day but less than a month."

But presumably you have to draw the line somewhere. Or else you can't call shoes shoes or horses horses... "Yes, but the big difference is that shoes and horses are actual physical objects, whereas something like a week is an abstract concept."

Nevertheless, a central problem with fantasy must be having to invent the setting as well as telling the story. "Absolutely," Mark says. "Treverne, the crater city in *Shadow Maze*, is an example of that. But the way it came about was quite funny. Julia is having a lot of dreams, and we've used a fair bit of the imagery from those in various books. Whereas I very rarely remember anything I dream about. But I did dream about a place, a town, built inside a crater, which had high walls and a lake in it. It was very vivid, which I suppose is why I remembered it, and that image became Treverne. That's one of the reasons it was a fascinating place for us, and we've been thinking about possibly writing a short

story set there sometime. I can still see it now. In fact I want to go there!"

Fantasy has become a very broad field. Where does Julia place Jonathan Wylie in it? "I think we're very traditional heroic-fantasy writers. We wouldn't make any great claims in terms of what we do. We've always taken the attitude that we simply want to tell a good story, and if we can entertain and interest people, that's great. It's what we set out to do, and hopefully, within the frameworks we use, we have sufficient originality to achieve that.

"We can see there are certain concerns and so on that we share with other authors, but I don't know where we'd put ourselves in terms of the field. We haven't really thought about it in that way. As you say, fantasy covers such an incredible spectrum, and it's not organized in any way. The appeal of a lot of it is that it's the same every time, to a certain extent. Readers know what they like and one shouldn't be snobbish about that."

Mark believes fantasy's appeal is different for everyone who reads it. "There may be as many appeals as there are readers, in fact. Obviously there's the escapist element, and there's the fact that it's imaginative fiction. We think with the stuff we write it's that you get a story which carries you along. That's our whole intention. We don't set out to change anybody's life.

"You could also say that *Shadow Maze* and our other books can be classified in terms of the old theme of Good versus Evil. That confrontation usually features in our work. But it's the things you build around it. If you like, it's the sort of skeleton. What you add – the flesh and blood – is what makes the difference."

For Julia, their characters are the important element. "You have the traditions of fantasy in there, but it's the people I'm concerned with. Their reactions, what they'll do in a given situation, generates a lot of our plot dynamics. That's why we work very hard on dialogue. It's very important to us that it's not stiff. It has to be real.

"Because we concentrate so much on characterization we get involved whether we like it or not. If you didn't, I think there would be something wrong. We end up getting so involved sometimes we literally cry about it. Which is crazy, because these are totally imaginary characters. But they matter to us, and if they don't matter to us, there's no hope they'll ever matter to anybody else. By the end of a book they're people we know.

"I remember when we finished the first trilogy we were totally bereft because they weren't there any more. But in a funny kind of way we don't finish with them, they finish with us."

MILLION

Some back-issue highlights:

No.1: James Ellroy interview (Paul McAuley); Kim Newman on gangsters; Stan Nicholls, Brian Stableford, Mark Morris & many others

No.2: Kurt Vonnegut interview (Colin Greenland); Joan Aiken, Sherlock Holmes, P.C. Wren; plus Wendy Bradley, Nick Lowe

No.3: Anne McCaffrey interview; Angus Wells, Fu Manchu; Stableford on Rider Haggard; plus John Christopher, Dave Langford & others

No.4: Ellis Peters interview (Mike Ashley); Andy Sawyer on Virginia Andrews; Stableford on James Hadley Chase; plus Langford, Byrne

No.5: Terry Pratchett, J.G. Ballard, Anne Rice & David Morrell interviews; Stableford on ERB (this is the same as *Interzone* no.51)

No.6: Dorothy Dunnett interview (Lisa Tuttle); Mary Higgins Clark, Thomas Harris; Stableford on Robinson Crusoe's children

No.7: Campbell Armstrong, Hammond Innes & Norman Mailer interviews; Mike Ashley on the *Strand* magazine; Stableford on Hank Janson

No.8: Stephen Gallagher & John Harvey interviews; Sawyer on "slaver" novels; Stableford on Hammett & Chandler; much more

No.9: Geoff Ryman interview (Newman); Doc Savage; historical mysteries; sequels & prequels; Hollywood novels; etc, etc.

No.10: Peter Lovesey on Leslie Charteris; Andrew Vachss & Jonathan Kellerman interviews; Elvis Presley; Rex Stout

No.11: Garry Kilworth on animal fantasy; Michael Crichton, James Herbert, Peter Tremayne; Andrews on Richard S. Prather

No.12: S.T. Joshi on Robert Aickman; series characters, Fay Weldon, Robert Graves, Rupert Bear; Langford, Nick Austin & many more

No.13: Clive Barker interview (Nicholls); Newman on Dracula; Joshi on Stephen King; Stableford on Shangri-La; Bradbury comics

No.14: Patricia Kennealy interview; Jack the Ripper, John D. MacDonald, Dorothy Sayers; Ian R. MacLeod on Gerald Seymour; & much more

All available from *Interzone* – see page 3.

THE WELFARE MAN CHRIS BECKETT



On Sunday his daughter and the boys came over and they all went to the Zoo.

Zoos were different now, all smilodons and woolly rhinos – creatures that in Cyril's childhood had existed only in picture books – but of course the boys took it in their stride. Alex, Jan's eleven-year-old, was a great authority on genetic archaeology; he explained incessantly and in great detail the many clever ways in which the scientists had recovered fragments of DNA from frozen corpses and desiccated skins, and how these tiny fragments were painstakingly reassembled along chromosomes extracted from modern mammals, and...

Jan saw that Cyril was getting tired.

"Wow, look at that, Dad!" she said, taking his arm and giving it a squeeze, "Mammoths!"

An awesome sight! Six of the huge Ice Age animals were being led past by their keepers.

"Did you know, mum," said Alex, "that these Bristol mammoths are the most authentic mammoths in the whole world? They are actually more than ninety-five percent real mammoth's genes. The

Japanese ones are only seventy percent. The Russian ones – well – they're really just Indian elephants with long hair..."

Ben was afraid – he was only four – and wanted the comfort of his mother's arms. Alex had an almost equally powerful need to pour out to her all the interesting facts about mammoths that he carried in his brain. As nobody had any attention left for Cyril, he left them to it, wandering ahead by himself, following the six great Pleistocene beasts as they were led back to their enclosure.

Much though he loved his daughter and grandsons, there was a gulf between him and them. With her brisk, bustling, successful life, Jan could not really comprehend the sheer emptiness of his solitary widower's existence. Still less could she understand the world he inhabited at work, so many lightyears away from the world in which she lived, and from the jolly, affluent, interested world of this zoo.

Magnificently indifferent to the chitter-chatter all around them, the mammoths passed through the crowds of little human creatures.



"Where the Japanese scientists went wrong, mum, was this..." Cyril heard Alex saying.

He snorted. These creatures were nobody's creation. Scientists just happened to be the agents that had awoken them. But if you waited long enough, everything would return.

From the far side of the zoo a smilodon screamed.

One day this whole city would be buried again beneath the ice: all these roads, all these signs, all these excited jabbering words... And then the mammoths, in their vast herds, would roam the earth once more.

Strangely comforted, Cyril smiled.

"Grandad! Grandad! We're going to look at the baby megatherium!"

Next morning he woke up alone in his widower's bedroom. Jan and the boys had gone home. He had only their photo on the shelf, next to the photo of Sarah. He dressed, drank a coffee and picked up his briefcase. The house was clean but lifeless, having lost its animating spirit.

He shut the door behind him and got into his car, immediately switching on the news.

"Serbia and the EC: Time to come in out of the cold?. America: New laws outlaw Einstein and Darwin..."

He backed out of his drive.

"South Asia: Another day of ethnic conflict in the former India and Pakistan... But first: Compassion or Oppression? The Democratic Party speaks out on the Social Compromise..."

Cyril flinched. His first impulse was to switch off immediately, but he made himself listen as he headed down to the main road-track, and set the controls for the ten-kilometre journey via the Portway, Ashton Gate and Bedminster to his place of work.

"The social compromise is degrading and a violation of human dignity," said a Democrat politician.

"But what is so wrong about it?" said the minister. "A bank is entitled to attach conditions when it makes a loan, a Receiver is entitled to impose restrictions on a bankrupt company. So why is society not entitled to impose some restrictions on those

of its citizens who ask it to provide for them financially?"

Outside: the leafy streets, the famous Gorge...

"You see," said the minister, in that confiding voice which politicians use, "however much we might like it, you just can't mix a free market economy with a universal safety net. One always undermines the other. That was where we went wrong in the last century. If you want both a market and the safety net, you have to ensure there is a clear boundary between the two – a 'formal frontier' – so that everyone knows when they move from one to another, and knows that different rules apply..."

They put the Democrat back on again then, but Cyril switched off. He was a *deskie*, a welfare man; the Social Compromise was his life – and he could not afford to lose what little faith remained.

And, in any case, he had reached the Line.

There was a checkpoint manned by an officer of the DeSCA constabulary and his robot minder (the robot was ferociously armed). Cyril pulled up and leant out of the window. He smiled, though he didn't feel like smiling. His stomach always clenched as he entered the Estate.

"Quiet night, Dave?"

"Yep, not bad," said the policeman. "Dan Wheeler and a couple of his mates tried to shift some dodgy dreamer units over the Line again, but we spotted the labels had been tampered with. So we nicked them!"

Cyril laughed. The enormous Wheeler/Pendant/Delaney clan were well known on the Estate. "What I'll never understand is why he keeps trying! I mean, holding down a steady job would be child's play by comparison!"

The policeman shrugged. "Well, that's dreggies for you."

Sensitized by the criticisms of the Democrat politician, Cyril winced.

Electronic readers in the road checked out the registration, chassis and engine numbers of his car as he passed over the Line into the West Country's largest Special Category estate.

Special Category. Anyone in Europe would have instantly recognized what kind of place this was: the concrete buildings, the trampled parks, the graffiti, the ubiquitous Dreamer Shops renting out software with names like "WARM GORE," "SEX HEAVEN," "BARBARIAN RAIDER"... It was a *dreg* estate and the people who inhabited it were *dreggies*. Their ID cards were different to other people's, they were subject to different laws, they spoke differently, smelled differently, they wore tattoos and shaved bald patches on their heads for the ingestion of electronic dreams...

Cyril drove down a road called Axis One. (The side roads, where people lived in concrete semis and low-rise flats, had flower names: Asphodel Way, Buttercup Crescent, Catmint Drive, Daisy Close, Edelweiss Grove...) With a bewildered, guilty affection he peered out at the people passing by.

Many of them he knew. (He had worked in this Estate since it was built.) Here was old Janie Pendant, who lived in a third-floor flat piled high with twenty years-worth of tabloid papers, and insisted on cooking over a candle; there was crazy Alien Watson,

already ranting at the top of his voice on the corner of Magnolia Street about Sin and Filth and the End of the World, but pausing to give Cyril a thumbs-up and a mischievous smile. Here was fat, sweaty Tracey Parkin, who Cyril himself had taken into care from her chaotic, drug-abusing mother when he was a social worker all those years ago and placed with a foster-family in Clifton. Now she was pushing her own baby along in a buggy, with her mother – as ever – beside her.

"Why did we bother?" thought Cyril. "What did we think we were trying to do?"

He had got up to Yucca Walk and Zinnia Avenue – and Axis One opened into Knowle South's Central Square.

Here were a chippie, two dreamer places, a grocery, a sweetshop. There were four boys mixing glue and homegrown tobacco on the steps of the long-defunct fountain. There were shaven-headed young mums pushing buggies. There was a block of offices with bars over the windows and a three-metre-high wire fence. The office had a large blue sign with a logo that depicted one hand reaching down protectively to another. DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL CATEGORY ADMINISTRATION, it said, or would have done, if someone had not painted a thick blue line through "SPECIAL CATEGORY ADMINISTRATION" and written "NIGGER-LOVERS."

Last night someone else had drawn a red line through this and written "RACIST APRESSERS."

Cyril made some comment about the new inscription to the policeman on duty at the gate. The officer grinned: "If we can be accused of being racists and nigger lovers, maybe that means we are getting the balance about right!"

And he laughed uproariously, his huge minder looking down from behind like some kind of mutant praying mantis.

"Fort Apache" the Knowle South DeSCA office was called by the staff who worked within its walls.

Another car entered the compound as Cyril was getting out of his.

"Mr Burkett!" called out its driver. "I believe I'm coming to the same meeting as you."

Cyril stared blankly. He was getting old. He found it increasingly hard to remember faces. Or perhaps it was just that he didn't try.

"Oh... yes... Dr Rajman, isn't it?"

The young Asian nodded. He was a Sponsored G.P., maintaining a quota of non-fee-paying Special Category patients on his list, for which he was paid a retainer by the Department's Health & Hygiene Service – a sort of vestigial remnant of the old NHS.

"Of course the meeting isn't for another twenty minutes," said Cyril.

"I know, but I've got a bone to pick with the H&H people and I thought I might as well sort it out while I'm here. They've sent me the wrong cheque three times in a row."

Cyril smiled, a little sourly. Most young doctors did Sponsored work for a few years until they built up their own lists of private patients. Complaining about the DeSCA bureaucracy was all part of the drill. It gave them a principled reason for dropping their sponsored work later, when the private work had

got going. ("I'm a doctor, damn it, not a filler-in of forms!").

He placed his forefinger on the Print Reader outside the steel door and spoke into the Voice Check: "Cyril Burkett. My companion is Dr Rajman, who is attending the 9.20 registration conference."

The steel door slid open. Inside was a small reception area, where Cyril and the Doctor were scrutinized for a few seconds by wall-mounted video cameras before a second door opened.

"Security has tightened up a bit since I was last here," Rajman observed.

"It's because of Oxford, I'm afraid," said Cyril as they went through.

"Blackbird Leys," he added, when Rajman still looked blank.

But the G.P. seemed not to have heard of the latest lynchings. Perhaps that was understandable. It was only desks that were killed, after all.

Up in Cyril's fifth-floor office, his colleague Alice had his coffee ready.
"Alice, you're a gem."

He settled gratefully into a swivel chair and accepted the warm cup. Since Sarah's death, his relationship with Alice had come to mean a great deal to him. She looked after him. Her husband was paraplegic and had a drink problem. She looked after him too.

"Are you all right, Cyril? You look troubled."

"Just tired really. Oh, and there was this damned Democrat politician on the radio this morning, going on about the Compromise..."

Alice laughed, misunderstanding the source of his unease. "Well, there's not much chance of the Democrats doing anything about it, is there?"

She was right of course. The two wings of the old Tory party – *Britain First* and *Forward with Europe* – had passed the roles of government and opposition to and fro between themselves for more than twenty years.

"It's not that," Cyril said, "it's the fact that they may be right. I mean, I agree with them on most other things. I vote Democrat in fact. Maybe they're right about the Compromise too. Maybe we are just agents of oppression."

"Oh, surely not," said Alice, gathering together her papers for a nine o'clock meeting.

She was a generous person, a wise person in many ways, but she was politically blind. She could work for a firm producing nerve gas – and she would still feel quite happy and satisfied that she was helping, just so long as she was allowed to remember the birthdays of the other staff, and bring them little thoughtful presents when they were down.

"See you later, Cyril," said Alice, giving him a concerned pat on the arm as she went out.

Cyril got up and went to the big North-facing window. You could see straight down Axis One to the Line and to the Fringe estates beyond (where the working-class inhabitants clung precariously to their jobs and their non-Special status). And beyond that, across the Cumberland Basin, the real Bristol stood, prosperous and sparkling, on her seven hills: a city where vandalism and disorder were rarely seen, a city where children played in parks that were clean and

full of flowers, a city where the price of a glass of white wine at the Westbury Arms had remained constant at thirty Units for the past eight years. (While Asia fractured herself into a hundred bleeding pieces, while Africa burned, while America languished under the TV-religious tyranny of President Elisha Jones and his Committee for the Reception of Jesus... Who could really tell? Maybe the Compromise was a price worth paying?)

His phone rang. Inwardly cursing, he picked it up.

"Hello! Cyril Burkett here..."

From the deepest pit of hell a faint voice whispered: "Burkett. You deskie swine. You piece of shit. I'll get you, I'll get you, I'll get you..."

"Who are you? Who..."

But the line went dead. He stood alone in his office, a dry leaf shrivelling in a flame.

"Well, colleagues. It's 9.25, so perhaps we had better make a start. For those of you that don't know me, my name is Cyril Burkett and I am the Assistant Regional Registration Officer. This is a Contested Initial Registration Conference within the meaning of the 2003 Act, concerning Stacey Blows of 34 Lilac Flats. Miss Blows herself has been invited to attend at ten o'clock. Let's start with a round of introductions..."

Jovial Charlie Blossom, with his sports jacket and his Scout tie, explained he was the Registration Liaison Officer from the Housing Section.

"Joy Frost, Headmistress, Virginia Bottomley Memorial School," barked out the dapper woman to Charlie's left. "Stacey Blows' daughter, Ulrike, is our pupil."

Cyril smiled. Joy was a tough old boot. You had to be to teach in a Special Category School – and face the abuse not only of the children but of the rest of your profession. Teachers in the last remnant of the state sector were seen as no-hopers unable to cope with the fiercely competitive world that was education outside the Estates.

Dr Rajman introduced himself irritably. (Why should he attend meetings at the DeSCA if they couldn't pay his fees?)

A very young and pretty WPC called Fran Stimbling explained that she was on temporary secondment to the DeSCA Constabulary from Avon & Somerset Police and that she had come in the absence of Sergeant Walker and had no personal knowledge of Stacey Blows.

"Welcome, Fran," said Cyril.

Then a small, thin, frightened woman introduced herself as Christine Wothersmere, a Welfare Investigator in the Community Hygiene Team (as the Child Protection Unit had been renamed since accepting sponsorship from the manufacturers of TCP). She was, in other words, a kind of social worker, a member of Cyril's own former profession – though it was very different nowadays, an almost entirely clerical function, feeding statistics into data-processing systems, reporting to computers and lawyers for instructions.

And a very elegant, large person beside her explained that she was Harriet Vere-Richards and was a voluntary Lay Representative appointed by Bristol City Council.

There were letters of apology from the Probation Service and from the Benefits Section.

"Good," said Cyril, "welcome, everybody. Stacey Blows, who was born on 6th September 1995, holds *de facto* Special Category citizenship as a result of having grown up in this Estate and having a Special Category parent. Now that she is approaching 21, it is our task to determine whether she ought to be registered as a Special Category citizen in her own right."

"I don't think there's much doubt about it in dear old Stacey's case," said Charlie with his friendly laugh, "half the neighbourhood knows her as the Two-Ecu Bang."

Cyril ignored this. "Stacey, as is her legal right, has indicated that she would oppose registration, and she will be here to put her views to us in person after we have had a preliminary discussion among ourselves. A transcript of the meeting will be made available to her and she will be entitled to take the matter to court under section 8 of the Act if she does not agree with our decision."

He tapped the keyboard of the speech processor, which proceeded to read out the background report.

"Stacey Blows' mother is Jennifer Pendant, White British, of 65 Rose Corner..."

(Here Charlie and Joy chuckled knowingly, as old Knowle South hands generally did whenever a member of the Wheeler/Pendant/Delaney tribe was mentioned.)

"Her father is Roger Blows, Mixed Race British, of 105 John Major Way, Hartcliffe North. She attended South Knowle Secondary School and left without any formal qualifications, though she possesses basic literacy and numeracy skills up to Age Ten Standard. She has never worked and now lives on National Basic Benefit. From the ages of 14 to 16 she was Accommodated under the 2005 Children Act at one of the Child Protection Service's Group Homes. She then moved into a flat at 58c Japonica Gardens where her first child, Ulrike, was born on May 1st, 2011. Stacey Blows indicates that she is not sure who Ulrike's father is and has named two different possible men when asked."

Joy Frost sighed. The computer went on: "Her second child, Wolfgang, was born in 2012. His father was allegedly one Archduke Wayne Delphonse Delaney, now serving a prison sentence for armed robbery and Line offences. Following the birth of Wolfgang, she moved to her present address where Kazuo was born in 2014."

The conference – or those members of it who were listening – smiled at the German and Japanese names. It was a fashion that had swept the British Estates because of the dominance of the Dreamer market by the two superpowers. (In the case of the Germans, who increasingly did not bother to dub their Dreamware in English, not only the names but the language itself was starting to penetrate the Dreamer-fed argot of the Estates.)

"Kazuo's father was allegedly one Benjamin Tonsil, whose present whereabouts Stacey does not know. Stacey has several offences for shoplifting and two minor Line violations. The Community Hygiene Team have also been involved in investigating various allegations of child neglect, which Mrs Wothersmere will fill us in on."

Christine Wothersmere gave a little gasp and rummaged through her papers...

"We'll come to that in a minute" said Cyril. "Are there any questions at this stage? Mrs Vere-Richards? Is everything clear to you so far?"

"Yes, yes, *thankyou!*" gushed the Lay Representative, "I can only say how struck I am by the sheer complexity of the problems you..."

But whatever else she said was drowned out by a police helicopter passing low overhead.

Since a mob had burned down that DeSCA sub-office in Blackbird Leys, and eight of its staff had died, the Department had nearly doubled its helicopter force across the country. Helicopters had always patrolled the Lines but now they monitored "People flow" within the Estates themselves, looking out for unusual confluences, for worrying aggregation patterns...

Cyril suddenly thought, "Yes, of course!"

He remembered a young man at a meeting just like this one: a human face almost totally obliterated under a lurid tattoo of a bloody skull, muscles taut, eyes icy with hatred... "I'll get you," mouthed the lips of the skull face, unseen by anyone else but him, "I'll get you, you deskie swine..."

"How many people?" he thought, "how many people out there would kill me if they only got the chance?"

Everyone was watching him. The room was silent except for the frantic rustling of Mrs Wothersmere, who had brought the wrong notes.

Cyril cleared his throat. "Yes...Now...Before going any further, I need to remind the conference of the criteria for registration laid down under section 5 of the Act. If you remember we have firstly to be able to agree that Stacey demonstrates what is called in the legal jargon '*substantial fecklessness*' in two or more of the 'core areas': Financial Affairs, Family Relationships, Basic Citizenship, Health and Hygiene. Secondly, as this is a contested case, we have to demonstrate that non-registration would be, in the words of the Act '*contrary to the public interest.*' Now, if we can start with the first core area, which is Financial Affairs. Any comments here?"

Charlie Blossom immediately launched into the long and (to him) hilarious story of Stacey Blows' repeatedly vandalized electricity meter, enthusiastically supported by WPC Stimbling who read out a long list of criminal offences against Western Electricity in a shocked breathless voice.

Cyril's mind wandered. He doodled on his pad, underlining random words.

Stacey. Stacey. STACEY. Those old American names: Jason, Stacey, Wayne... Stacey's parents must have been among the last to use them. Strange to remember there was a time when America was associated with style and freedom and fun...

("...and then," Charlie Blossom exclaimed, "she went and did it again!...")

"I am growing old," thought Cyril. He was dreading a lonely retirement. He was dreading having time to look back over his life: so many compromises, so many decisions ducked as he climbed his little career-ladder through all the reorganizations and

restructurings and rationalizations. Each step had somehow seemed reasonable and justifiable at the time, the best he could do. But all the time the old public welfare system was being slowly dismantled around him – leaving only a rump service in which the remnants of all the agencies were gradually amalgamated together: Housing with Social Services, Social Services with Health, Health with Social Security...

He had started out wanting to help people; he had become the administrator of an Underclass.

Well, that's society's choice not mine, he had always told himself, and at least it pays the mortgage and has a decent pension scheme. We can have fun when I retire.

And then Sarah had died.

The helicopter passed back overhead. It was so low that, beneath its engine and the throb-throb of its blades, you could just faintly hear the crackling of its ground-link radio.

"...Hartcliffe East...Exit violations...Road patrol..."

"...of course," said Charlie, "the lodgers are another whole story..."

Stacey had her hair shaven in stripes, so as to allow easy contact to the scalp for the electrodes of Dreamer sets, which supplemented sensory stimulation with low-voltage jolts to the brainstem and hypothalamus. Her arms were covered in tattoos of Teutonic warriors, and cross-hatched with self-inflicted scars. Her ears were riddled with holes from which bones, hearts, swastikas, dice, St Christophers and miniature Suzuki motorcycles were suspended. She wore a long tee-shirt with Japanese characters and a picture of a burning Zero fighter – and a short black skirt that left her thin, pale legs quite bare. On her forehead was a deathhead "Liebe-Hass" hologram, on her hip a little scabrous feral child with its face smeared with something sticky and cheap and red.

Everyone went quiet, as they always did in these moments when they had finished picking over a person's life and were confronted with the real human being. Charlie remembered with a little pang of guilt the amusing but unfounded comment he had made about Stacey being on the game. Christine Wothersmere wondered whether she should really have described her so very firmly as a "complete and utter no-hoper" in order to cover her own embarrassment at having brought the wrong file. Fran Stimbling, who was almost exactly Stacey's age, went bright red and glared angrily down at the table.

Only Joy and Cyril looked Stacey in the eye.

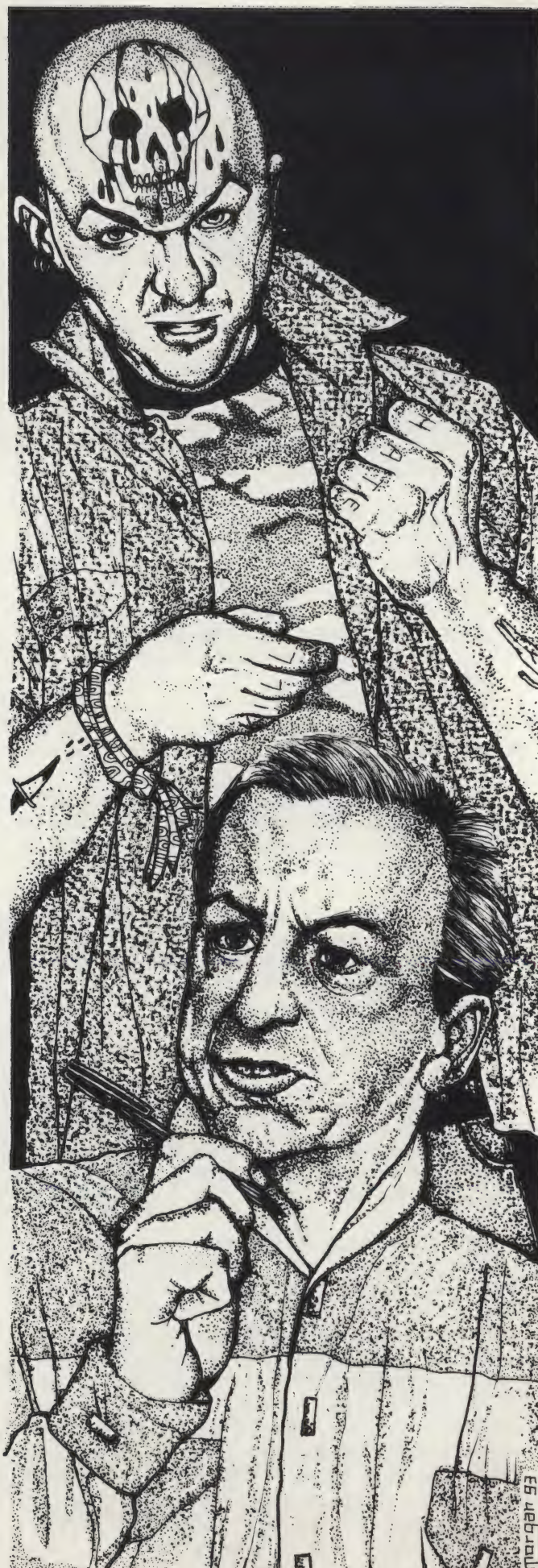
"Welcome, Stacey," he said, "do have a seat. Let's start by checking you know everyone here..."

The child – little Kazuo – reached out across the table for one of the carafes of water that stood there. Stacey smacked him hard and everybody winced.

"Well, I knows 'im, ja," she said, looking at Dr Rajman, who blushed. "I knows 'im. 'E gives I me 'scriptions for me fags."

She suddenly treated them all to a smile of dazzling and utterly unexpected sweetness.

"Ja, und I knows 'er," she went on, in the strange slow Germanized West Country burr that was the



patois of the Bristol Estates. "She gets I Kaz's milch and that and tells I I ain't feedin' 'im prarper. Und Mister Blarssom und Miss Frarst, I know them..."

WPC Stimbling was introduced.

"And I'm Harriet Vere-Richards," gabbled the Lay Representative, sensing that her moment had come. "You don't know me, Stacey, but I'm here to look after your interests. I'm not a professional person like the other people here, you see. I'm just an ordinary Bristol person like yourself..."

There was a moment of silence in which this preposterous statement was allowed to quietly fade into the air.

"Now Stacey," said Cyril after a decent interval, "we understand that you don't want to be registered as a Special Category Citizen. I wonder if you could tell us a bit about why?"

"Well, it's just I thought I'd like to be an or'nary person with a white card, you know, und not be a dreggie any more, und feel people's laughing at I and that..."

"I'm sure we all understand that, but I wonder where you would live if you weren't Special Category any more? Because of course, you'd have to give up your tenancy here within six months."

Cyril was courteous, but his mind was far away. He had been here so very many times before.

"Well, o'course I 'adn't really thought yet, but I'd look in the papers and that..."

"What about money, Stacey? You know, don't you, that only Special Category citizens can apply for National Basic Benefit? You don't get benefits outside unless you've subscribed to a private scheme."

Kazuo started reaching out for the water again. Stacey distracted him by giving him a packet of sweets, which he devoured three or four at a time.

"I could get a jarb," she said, without much conviction.

"Good for you, but of course then there'd be the care arrangements for the children..."

"Wolfie's in the nursery now und ich bin trying to get a place for Kaz..."

"But you mustn't forget, Stacey, that you only get free nurseries in the Estates. Outside you have to pay the market rate which is about two thousand Units per week I believe."

Stacey looked flustered. The deathshead on her forehead glowed red. (It was made to respond to changes in skin temperature, and was supposed to give outward expression to Love and Hate – Liebe und Hass – those powerful forces in the crude, elemental, violent life of every Estate.)

"I 'ates meetings," she muttered.

"You see, Stacey," Cyril explained, "we've been talking a bit about your circumstances, and we really do think that it isn't the right moment for you to drop your Special Category status. Of course you are entitled to your say, and you're entitled under the Act to go to court if you don't agree with our decision, but I'd like you to think carefully about what is really right for you and see if we can't come to some agreement. Will you do that?"

He paused and Stacey nodded humbly, as people usually did at this point. (Only a few of them erupted into rage as they saw the net closing around them.)

Joy Frost, the headmistress, stepped in.

"Stacey, I think you and I get on pretty well don't we?"

Stacey nodded.

"Well, listen. You used that silly word 'dreggie,' and there are a lot of other silly words that are used about Special Category citizens. But what I always tell people to remember is this: Special Category means what it says. You are *special*. I for one happen to believe you need special help, and I believe you deserve it. By keeping you Special Category we are making sure that you get a whole range of services that you couldn't otherwise get. A time may come, Stacey, when you don't need those things – and when that day comes, you get back to us and we'll be the first to say 'Hooray! Well done! Let's get you off that register at once!' – but we do think you need those services now."

Cyril smiled. Joy was one of the few DeSCA employees he knew who really and sincerely believed that the Department's whole purpose was to better the lives of its customers. It was a belief she lived out every day of her life.

"So what do you say, Stacey," said Joy. "Be honest, doesn't it make sense?"

Stacey nodded reluctantly. Kazuo emptied the carafe across the table. There was a pause while Charlie fetched some paper towels and Dr Rajman dabbed angrily at his sodden personal organizer.

"But before you finally make up your mind," said Cyril, "there are some obligations attached to registration as well as benefits. It's part of my job to spell them out for you."

Although he knew this section of the Act off by heart, Cyril had the habit of opening the copy of the Act that lay in front of him, and smoothing down the relevant page. The rules were made by society as a whole and not by him. Only by reminding himself and them of this fact could he look the customers in the face.

"First of all, there are some rules about your movements outside the Estate. As you know, the general rule is that you can go where you like when you like. The only thing is: you are obliged to show the duty officer your ID when you cross the Line, and to tell him where you're going and when you're coming back. It is an offence not to co-operate with the duty officer on the Line. And of course, your movement can be restricted by Exit Restriction orders if you commit offences."

"It's only when people are silly that the court orders come into it," said Joy Frost.

Stacey nodded. You got caught shop-lifting down in Broadmead and you got a one-month Exit Restriction. You got caught burgling a house in Clifton and you got Restriction for six months or a year. Everyone knew that!

Joy turned to Mrs Vere-Richards: "It always sounds so awful, but you've got to remember that in the old days, you were just sent to prison!"

"Absolutely!" agreed the Lay Representative. She was an activist in the *Forward with Europe* party. She knew quite well that one of the benefits of the Compromise was a reduction in the prison population.

"Secondly," Cyril went on, "there are some rules about credit. You can't get a credit card if you are on the Special Category register, you can't get a bank

loan and you can't enter into a hire-purchase agreement. If you really need a loan, you have to sort it out with our own Benefit Section here at the DeSCA."

Charlie Blossom chuckled: "I wish I could get those rules applied to my wife!"

"I wish someone could apply them to me," piped in WPC Stimbling.

"Absolutely!" said Mrs Vere-Richards.

"But seriously, Stacey," said Joy Frost, "the credit rules are purely and simply for your own benefit: to save you all the worry and trouble of getting in debt."

Stacey smiled: "Ja, I'd 'ate it if they gave I one of them cards."

"Sensible girl!" said Charlie.

"The only other restriction," Cyril went on, "is about voting in elections..."

"Oh, I ain't bothered about that!"

"All as bad as each other, eh, Stacey?" chuckled Charlie.

"Absolutely!" laughed Mrs Vere-Richards.

The skull on Stacey's forehead had returned to its normal lurid green.

When Cyril went out to drive over to Hartcliffe, he found Mrs Vere-Richards just about to get into her Volvo.

"Thankyou so much, Mr Burkett," she enthused, "I really was most impressed. I only wish some of the people who knock your department could see that, when it is properly and sympathetically explained to them, people actually *choose* registration of their own free will! I really was – well – moved, by what I saw."

Cyril smiled non-committally. "Well, I suppose we all have our doubts about the system from time to time..."

"Oh, you mustn't have doubts. You're doing a marvellous job. And of course, it's so marvellous for the whole country too, because it keeps *inflation* down."

Cyril took the short cut down Bland Drove which he always used when heading towards the southern gate of the estate. He felt better for some reason: one meeting done – only three more to go. He put Handel on the CD:

"...and the government shall be upon his..."

He slammed down the brake.

A car had lurched straight across the road in front of him (an ancient, petrol-engined Ford covered in tribal symbols: swastikas, crosses, a faded transfer of the old Confederate flag...)

The Ford jerked to a halt in the middle of the road and three young men leapt out of it. One carried a baseball bat, the others heavy sledgehammers, and their bald heads were covered in tattoos. One of them had the face of a bloody skull superimposed in ink over his own.

"Oh dear," muttered Cyril. It had finally happened. This was it. This was what it was going to be like. And for a second or so he just waited, wondering how much it would hurt.

But then instinct took over. He glanced in his mirror, slammed the gear into reverse, stamped on the accelerator...

The first hammer smashed down on the windscreen, the first arm came reaching through, grabbing



the wheel and sending the car careering up onto the kerb...

And all around the dreggies had come out and were coolly watching – men, women, children, babies, many of them people that Cyril knew and would greet in the street...

Thrub – thrub – thrub.

A helicopter was overhead, a loudhailer roaring, canisters of tear gas thudding down on the road... the bystanders scuttled back indoors, squealing and shrieking with a strange mixture of fear and defiance and hilarity.

Cyril sank back in his seat. From three different directions he could hear the police cars whooping towards him across the Estate. His three assailants had somehow disappeared into the concrete, abandoning their dilapidated car.

"Are you all right sir?"

Kindly hands helped him up. Policewomen passed him tissues to wipe his tear-gassed eyes. Huge minder robots, stern and impersonal as the law itself, stalked up and down the street.

"I'm fine, I'm fine."

He ran his fingers through his white hair, removing fragments of broken glass. He beamed round at the policemen surrounding him. He really *did* feel fine. He felt strangely light and purged...

"How is my car? I've got a meeting at Hartcliffe at..."

"We'll phone and cancel your meeting for you, sir," said a sergeant. "I'll get one of my men to drive you home."

Cyril laughed. "No honestly, I'm fine. Never felt better in fact. If you can just get me to the DeSCA office at Hartcliffe..."

The sergeant was gentle but firm.

"You're suffering from shock sir. It'll hit you a bit later. PC Leonard here will give you a lift home."

Young, stern-faced PC Leonard led Cyril over to his car.

"It's the bloody Democrats that stir them up, sir," was his opinion as they set off. "It's just like Communism in the old days, isn't it? Stirring people up with dreams that can't come true. Why don't people learn? All that stuff should have gone with the Berlin Wall!"

Cyril smiled. "The Berlin Wall. A bit before your time I should have thought..."

They had come to the Line. A robot gazed down on them, like the inexorable angel at the gate of Eden.

Beyond, in the small, poor privately-rented Fringe Estate of Hengrove, the windows blazed with red, white and blue *Britain First* stickers from a recent by-election – defiant symbols of allegiance to the British state, and of differentness from that other Estate just across the Line, where nobody voted at all.

Cruising along the Portway, they passed the sign to Clifton and the zoo.

Cyril chuckled. He felt in an extraordinarily good humour. He felt he had a thousand interesting things to say.

"Zoos keep changing their purpose, don't they?" he said. "I still remember a time when they were purely and simply for our entertainment. Then everyone

said it was wrong to keep animals for our amusement. So zoos were suddenly all about conservation. The animals were sort of refugees who'd been persecuted in their own country and would be returned as soon as possible."

He laughed. "But now, of course, it's different again. Now it's not a matter of saving animals from extinction. It's about bringing back animals that already are extinct, increasing the gene-pool, repaying our debt to nature... The funny thing is of course that, whatever the rationale, it always boils down to the same thing: poor old animals locked up in cages – and people staring at them and going oooh!"

He laughed loudly at this, but PC Leonard was rather stung. He and his wife had actually "adopted" a small Pliocene opossum called Gringo that lived nowhere on earth but Bristol Zoo. They were very proud of their name on the 'possum's label, and of the framed certificate on the wall of their lounge.

"Oh I don't know, sir. I think it's very valuable work. And of course it's wonderful for Britain. I don't know if you saw on the telly last night, but..."

He glanced across, and the words died on his lips.

For the old welfare man had covered his face with his hands and was shaking with sobs. He was remembering the great mammoths in the zoo, and their dream of eternity and ice.

Chris Beckett has written four previous stories for *Interzone*, one of which ("La Macchina," issue 46) was reprinted by Gardner Dozois in his *The Year's Best SF* anthology. He lives in Cambridge and is – of course! – a social worker by profession.

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Yesterday's Bestsellers, 15: F. Anstey and *Vice Versa* by Brian Stableford

Vice Versa: or, A Lesson to Fathers by "F. Anstey," first published in 1882, has proved to be one of the most durable of all bestsellers, although the various adaptations for the stage, the cinema and TV which have kept it in the public eye have wrought a gradual transformation of its content. It is a work sustained by the strength of its central idea – a personality-exchange by means of which a father and his son find themselves inhabiting one another's bodies – and part of the strength of that idea is that it lends itself to constant updating while retaining all of its innate fascination. The original is a quintessentially Victorian fantasy, but the most recent film version, made in 1988 starring Judge Reinhold and Fred Savage, finds no difficulty in transplanting the premise to a modern American setting.

Although it was by no means the first literary account of an identity-exchange, *Vice Versa* was the first one to use that device to explore the conflict of attitudes and interests characteristic of different generations in a relatively even-handed way. Earlier stories of identity-exchange had focused on the awful disorientation suffered by a single displaced persona, or on the alleged futility of the notion that one might be better off living someone else's life. The comic potential of the notion had been explored in Robert MacNish's novelette "The Metempsychosis" (1826; originally signed "A Modern Pythagorean"), but not in any extended fashion. Longer works dealing with the transmigration theme had paid little or no attention to the reciprocity of the exchange, and tended to be more philosophically-inclined; the most notable example is Théophile Gautier's novella "Avatar" (1856). The

author of *Vice Versa* was able to capitalize on the relative familiarity of the idea to move on to the next logical stage, patiently comparing and contrasting the joys and miseries which result when the minds of an adult and a child are embodied in inappropriate bodies. As might be expected, the boy initially finds more advantages in the exchange than the man, but he eventually decides that the natural order of things had better be restored.

The superficial moral of *Vice Versa* is, of course, that we all ought to be content to occupy our rightful places in society. What other conclusion could any Victorian fantasy be expected to reach? There is, however, a more subversive subtext which delights in the undignified imprisonment of the father and the marvellous liberation of the son. Although the son ultimately, and unsurprisingly, proves incapable of making full and happy use of his liberation, it nevertheless remains a glorious liberation. Because the social positions of the two identity-exchangers are far from equal, the distribution of their miseries is dramatically unequal – and the story therefore has a second moral which runs in a contradictory direction to the more obvious one. *Vice Versa* is an essentially amiable book, with no trace of an iron fist lurking within its velvet glove, but it has claws of a kind, which deftly scratch away at the surface of thinly-armoured prejudices.

Many other writers were to take up the subversive thread of *Vice Versa*, using identity-exchanges as a means of exploring the iniquities of social inequality. *Vice Versa* itself is little more than a sustained and scathing demolition of the nostalgic and oppressive adult-

produced myth that one's school-days are the happiest days of one's life, but its formula was capable of many further variations, as well as adaptation to map future change in the pattern of father/son relationships.

Works wholly or partly inspired by *Vice Versa* extend over a considerable spectrum, both in tone and in the specific relationships which they scrutinize, but they all carry similarly subversive subtexts, and the more earnest of them bring their subtexts into sharp focus. Examples range from such relatively slight and straightforward comic imitations as "The Great Keinplatz Experiment" (1885; professor and student) by Arthur Conan Doyle and "The Strange Adventure of Roger Wilkins" (1895; employer and employee) by "R. Andom" (Alfred W. Barrett) to such weighty and heavy-handed moralistic fantasies as *The Doubts of Dives* (1889; rich man and poor man) by Walter Besant and *The Ealing Miracle* (1911; middle-class woman and "bad" girl) by Horace W.C. Newte. The one kind of body-swap which was potentially more interesting than the father/son exchange had, of course, to wait for standards of literary decency to be relaxed, and had even then to be treated relatively coyly, in *Turnabout* (1931; husband and wife) by Thorne Smith.

In spite of the subversive nature of the subtexts carried by stories of this kind, it is notable that very few of them refuse the climactic restoration of the status quo. Anstey, who was a conservative through and through in spite of his penchant for poking fun at the pretensions of his era, would never have considered such a move. *Vice Versa* presents a fine caricature of the Victorian man of business in

the character of Mr Paul Bultitude, and merrily heaps a plague of humiliations upon him while he is trapped in his son's body at an appalling preparatory school, but the story is devoid of any real animosity. The author never doubts for an instant that a bourgeois Victorian gentleman is the best thing in the world to be, and it is not surprising that so many fathers were happy to take their lesson in good part.

Having said this, though, it must also be observed that Anstey's narrative does dwell rather self-indulgently on the sheer horror of the elder Bultitude's predicament, and it does have some force as a straightforward revenge fantasy. Like all comedy, the comedy of Ansteyan fantasy has a slightly nasty streak, which is not always completely masked by the friendly smile it wears.

"F" Anstey" was the pseudonym of Thomas Anstey Guthrie, the son of a military tailor. He was born in 1856, just before the mid-point of Victoria's long reign, and was very much a product of that era. He intended to sign his work T. Anstey, but the typesetter of his first published short story, "Accompanied on the Flute" (1878), made a mistake and the author accepted the judgement of fate with characteristic good humour. In his posthumously-published autobiography, *A Long Retrospect* (1936), he remarked in an off-hand manner that he had never bothered to decide what the F was supposed to stand for. In the same volume he steadfastly refused to identify the preparatory school which furnished him with the background for *Vice Versa*, or to name its tyrannical headmaster, although it could hardly have done any harm to do so after half a century had passed. He did, however, take pains to insist that certain seemingly-unlikely episodes in the novel (the dictated letter home is a classic) were drawn with perfect accuracy from life.

From preparatory school Guthrie went to King's College School and eventually to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he read law. *Vice Versa* was begun and half-completed while he was still an undergraduate but he was forced

to put it aside when the death of his mother robbed him of his appetite for comedy. His first two stories, both published in the short-lived periodical *Mirth*, were non-fantastic comedies that drew on his classical education, but he found a more productive vein in his parodies of the popular ghost stories of the day, "The Wraith of Barnjum" (1879) and "The Curse of the Catafalques" (1882). His other early stories were sickly-sentimental tales of childhood – "The Sugar Prince" (1880) is a typical example. He always considered himself to be gifted with a special insight into the world of children's experience, although he only wrote one book specifically aimed at juvenile readers and never had any children of his own; indeed, he never married, becoming a paradigm example of that now-extinct but then-honoured stereotype, the confirmed bachelor.

At first, *Vice Versa* met a distinctly cool reception from publishers, but the magazine-editor and humorist James Payn persuaded George Smith of Smith, Elder & Co to take a chance with it. Smith paid £25 for the copyright and promised the author a further £25 if the book were ever reprinted, but he felt guilty enough after its runaway success to pay out a further £500. Although Guthrie had by then been called to the bar he promptly gave up the law and became a man of letters. His ambition was to become a serious novelist, but in the event his earnest works failed dismally, and his reputation came to rest entirely on his comic writings. He earned his living primarily as a member of the regular stable of writers supplying material to *Punch*.

"F. Anstey" was never able to repeat the runaway success of *Vice Versa*, and always regretted the fact. His serious novels were not nearly as good as he certainly hoped and perhaps believed – the first of them, *The Giant's Robe* (1884), is so ponderously mannered and pompously moralistic that it would surely never have been published had it not had a best-selling name attached to it – but some of his subsequent comic fantasies were both better-written and more substantial than *Vice Versa*. Like other writers before him, though, Anstey found that

the Victorians preferred their comedies and their fantasies to be determinedly insubstantial. Even Charles Dickens had failed to recapitulate the popular success of *A Christmas Carol* (1843) in weightier moral fantasies like *The Chimes* (1844) and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848) because his public much preferred the cosy and unthreatening sentimentality of *A Cricket on the Hearth* (1845); poor Anstey had no chance of succeeding where Dickens had failed.

Anstey's settlement into the specialism of comic fantasy was gradual and grudging. His second comic novel, *A Tinted Venus* (1885) was commissioned by the Bristol-based publisher Arrow-smith, who specialized in slim volumes about the size of today's paperback. It begins promisingly enough but peters out feebly; this was partly because the nature of the commission required a modest word-length, but also, one suspects, because the ominous subtext threatened to overtake and overwhelm the light comedy. *The Tinted Venus* is one of several notable fantasies based on an anecdote in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, about a statue of Aphrodite which comes to life after a ring is placed on the finger in accidental imitation of a betrothal ceremony. Victorian hairdresser Leander Tweddle inevitably finds the amorous goddess a terrible embarrassment, but Anstey could only flirt very delicately with the erotic implications and in the end refused to follow up the more sinister aspects of the reincarnate Aphrodite's plans.

A Fallen Idol (1886), in which a young artist falls under the baleful influence of a statue infused by the spirit of a fake holy man mistakenly elevated to godhood, is not so half-hearted. It develops the element of unease much more strongly, resulting in some passages of authentic horror, and it certainly has claims to be considered Anstey's best book, but the audience seemed not to relish this development. The critical reception of the book was cool, and Anstey seems to have tried thereafter to keep the darker element in his work under a tight rein, although it resurfaces constantly and was eventually to move to

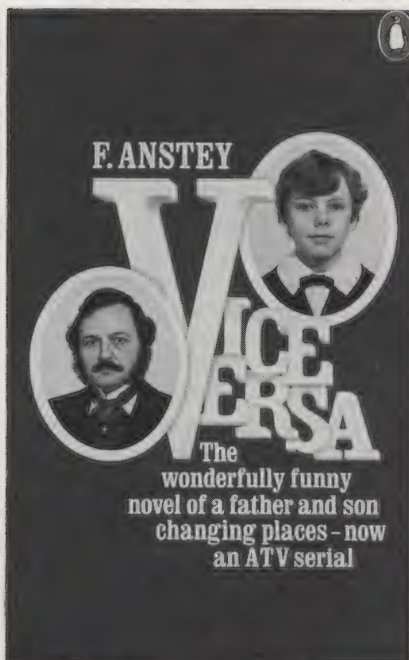
centre-stage in some of his later and briefer paranoid fantasies, most notably "The Lights of Spencer Primmitt's Eyes" (1896) and "Ferdie" (1907).

In 1887 Anstey "joined the *Punch* table" (the staff of the magazine enjoyed a ritual dinner in the office every Wednesday). The salary he was paid allowed him space to write another serious novel, *The Pariah* (1889), but it fared no better than *The Giant's Robe*. He was on the staff of the magazine for ten years, and became such a popular fixture in its pages that he was allowed to retain his precious seat at the table for some years after he reverted to irregular contributions paid on a piecework basis.

Most of the books Anstey published while he drew his salary from *Punch* were based on his work for the magazine, but he did write one more fantasy novel: a notable early time-paradox story called *Tourmalin's Time Cheques* (1891; later reprinted as *The Time Bargain*). This relates the adventures of a young man faced with the tedious prospect of a sea voyage from Sydney to London, who therefore accepts an offer made by a fellow-passenger to "deposit" the journey-time in a "bank." He finds himself immediately at home, in possession of a cheque-book with which he may redeem the deposited time by the hour whenever he wishes to enjoy a brief respite from his daily routine. Unfortunately, the hours which he reclaims are out of sequence, and he discovers that the voyage was much more eventful than he had anticipated. Complications multiply rapidly, until the interest earned by his deposit begins to overlap time through which he has already lived. Ingenious and delightful though it was, the book was not successful.

Guthrie tried yet again to gain recognition as a serious novelist when he produced *The Statement of Stella Moberly* (1896), publishing it anonymously so as not to prejudice the expectations of his readers. Like his earlier novels it is a story of intense psychological pressure, in this case exaggerated to the point where it results in mental abnormality. Although it

was considerably better than its predecessors its sales were even lower. Guthrie acknowledged defeat at this point, and immediately reverted to being F. Anstey, accepting all that the name implied. He never wrote another earnest book, although the quirky romantic novella *Love Among the Lions* (1898) is by no means a wholehearted comedy. His autobiography is scrupulously philosophical about his failure to produce a successful serious work, but the bitter disappointment of that failure is not entirely veiled. It is hardly surprising that his next



full-length project involved a calculated return to the formula which had served him best, nor that its skilful execution brought him his second-greatest success.

The Brass Bottle (1900) describes the adventures of Horace Ventimore, who liberates a jinnee from the eponymous object, which he purchases by accident at an auction. The jinnee is so grateful that he wants to make Horace the richest man in the world and gratify his every whim, but his efforts can cause nothing but embarrassment to a young man whose sole desire is to retreat into inconspicuous middle-class responsibility with his wife-to-be. The jinnee, seeing his finest gifts spurned and wasted, ultimately becomes impatient with his rescuer's ingratitude, and Horace is forced to use his wits rather more cleverly than the sailor in the famous tale from the *Thousand-and-One Nights* who con-

fronted a more straightforward threat from a less intelligent adversary.

Anstey must have had high hopes for his children's book *Only Toys* (1902), but it fell victim to disaster when the publisher went bankrupt immediately prior to its release; the copies were remaindered by the receiver without ever having been offered to the public at the full price. The story bears some relation to the manifest moral of *Vice Versa* in that it counsels children against being too eager to emerge from the nursery into the adult world. Its two protagonists, told that they are "growing out" of their toys, ask Santa Claus to reduce them in size so that they may re-enter the toys' world as equals. Unfortunately, the toys prove unrewarding companions, and the children are ungrateful; Santa Claus is moved to punish this ingratitude by making the toys "more human" – i.e., domineering, greedy and aggressive. The lesson which the children learn is sharp enough, although its moral propriety is not entirely clear.

In the early years of the twentieth century Anstey had rather more luck as a playwright than as a novelist. One of his *Punch* pieces, "The Man from Blankley's" was successfully, if somewhat belatedly, adapted for the stage in 1901 (the script had been written in 1893) and Anstey subsequently produced dramatic versions of many other works, including *The Brass Bottle* (1909) and *Vice Versa* (1910). It was through his association with the theatre that he eventually won a measure of the respectability he had long craved, and he devoted the last years of his life (he died in 1934) to the adaptation for the English stage of various plays by Molière. He wrote only one more novel, *In Brief Authority* (1915), which was very poorly received in spite of the fact that it ranks alongside *A Fallen Idol* as one of the most interesting of his works.

In Brief Authority reverses the strategy of Anstey's earlier fantasies. Instead of bringing a single magical object into the highly-ordered world of the respectable middle class, it displaces a "typical" middle-class family into a magical land. It is perhaps unfortunate that the Great War broke out

while the book was in production, given that the magical land in question is explicitly German, based on the *märchenland* of the Brothers Grimm.

The satirical edge which was carefully blunted in the earlier novels is here more finely-honed. The matron of the family to which the central characters belong is a hypocritical, self-deluding and thoroughly stupid snob who accepts an heirloom from one of her servants as security for a loan. Her possession of this object wrongly identifies her to emissaries from *märchenland* as their rightful queen. Her blinkered determination to import British social niceties into their barbaric realm nearly results in disaster, and the revelation that the humble and compassionate servant is in fact the true monarch comes just in time to avert actual and moral chaos.

In *A Long Retrospect* Anstey wrote off the failure of *In Brief Authority* with the suggestion that the time for his kind of humour had passed, but the continued activity of several imitators calls this conclusion into question, as does the success of a 1931 omnibus of his most popular works, *Humour and Fantasy*. It is more probably that, as with *A Fallen Idol*, the novel's sharpness made too many readers feel uncomfortable, refusing to let their pretensions and prejudices off the hook quite as easily as those of Mr Paul Bultitude, which had been more tenderly indulged and forgiven in *Vice Versa*.

There is a sense in which the particular species of humour featured in F. Anstey's novels was bound to go out of fashion following the end of the Victorian era. The stubborn rigidity of social conventions and the fiercely exacting pressure of middle-class mores which encapsulated the spirit of the great queen's reign were bound to be relaxed in due course. As they weakened, the extreme opposition between their uptightness and the anarchic mischief-making powers which Anstey imputed to pagan magic was gradually lost. The points which Anstey scored against the pomposity, self-congratulation and bigotry of the Victorians came

eventually to seem too easy, and the fact that he could remain fairly amiable and gentle while getting his digs in became a weakness rather than a strength in gaining the sympathy of readers.

Although his personal resentments and frustrations were always evident in his work, even when submerged, Anstey was too sensible – and too polite – to agonize about them. Many later writers were by no means so restrained. Those British humorists who preserved a polite amiability similar to Anstey's rarely toyed, as Anstey frequently did, with any real opposition to the values their characters embodied and upheld; those who were not so polite felt freer to indulge the naked hostility which he had so patiently clothed.

It is worth noting that *Laughing Gas* (1936), the sole fantasy novel written by P.G. Wodehouse, the leading politely-humorous writer of the post-Ansteyan era, is an identity-exchange story clearly inspired by *Vice Versa*, involving a typically-eccentric English aristocrat and a spoiled brat whose ego has been made monstrous by acting in the movies. Other British writers of Ansteyan fantasy mostly steered clear of that particular motif. The most successful of them, W.A. Darlington, substituted a comic cockney straight out of Anstey's long-running *Punch* feature "Voces Populi" for the more respectable heroes of Anstey's novels in *Alf's Button* (1919), which nearly achieved bestseller status. Its attempts to make light of the Great War were evidently welcome at the time, although they seem slightly sick to modern readers who know the truth which was carefully hidden by the military censors. Darlington's later novels in the same vein were, however, far less popular.

It is not altogether surprising that the most successful updating of Ansteyan fantasy was not carried out in Britain at all, but in the USA, where a different brand of absurd uptightness reached its peak in the era of the Volstead Act. The American writer Thorne Smith was able to take up where Anstey had left off partly because he was able to flirt much more audaciously with matters of

sexuality, but also because he was able to celebrate the magically-liberating effects of booze in collaboration with an audience which had witnessed the woefully unanticipated and ironically unfortunate effects of its prohibition.

In today's conscientiously liberal society there is much less scope for the effective use of Ansteyan fantasy, because there are very few social taboos which retain sufficient strength to provide worthy opposition to mischievous magic. Only children, it seems, nowadays live in a world rigidly bound by limits which are as patently unreasonable as they are oppressive, licensing the production of new Ansteyan fantasies for a juvenile audience – and, of course, the constant updating of *Vice Versa* for new generations. On the other hand, it might be noted that there never has been a competent reprise of Thorne Smith's *Turnabout*; one suspects that this is not because the inequalities of contemporary men and women are too trivial to warrant such examination, but rather because a thorough treatment of them would inevitably tend to the pornographic.

Perhaps there is scope here for a modern Anstey, who might just be able to bring off the trick of combining polite amiability with some sharply subversive commentary on the current state of play in the ongoing war of the sexes. There have been several moderately-effective timeslip fantasies of a feminist stripe, and it may be only a matter of time before a notable feminist variant of the theme of *Vice Versa* appears. Whether such a novel could revitalize Ansteyan fantasy for adult readers remains to be seen, but it might be foolish to be over-optimistic. It would surely require a writer of considerable skill to emulate Anstey in preventing such an exercise from collapsing into a mere horror story or a non-vintage whine.

The previous essay in this series, on W.H. Hudson and *Green Mansions*, appeared in *MILLION* number 14.

Glory Bee

John Clute

It's either a maggot heap or a hive of activity, this fourth year of the nineties, or both. The dominant science-fiction writers of 1993 are either feasting on the dead corpse of genre, or screwing like mink in the breeding den, or both. An old soak like Poul Anderson, for instance, spends half a book doing rumpelstiltskin riffs in the fields of the past, then leaps through a sequence of sling-shot endings like a bee drunk on futures. As though he never had left, Alfred Coppel returns to a version of the genre he had never left with a big long romantic tale which includes a sailing ship between the stars, a planetary romance, but also some new-genre sex and *sehnsucht*. David Brin, on the other hand, talks quite a bit about sex, but doesn't let any of his characters rattle his carefully constructed ambiguous new-think woman-led utopia by doing any of it, with men, or with each other either. And Christopher Evans, in one of the odder novels of any year, puts into her own bewildered words the tale of a UK princess tossed and turned by a cartland of romantic pash cruxes in an alternate world ruled by hunky Aztecs.

Poul Anderson spends significant bits of the first half *Harvest of Stars* (Tor, \$22.95) claiming what went wrong with the Future Histories, as promoted by him and his colleagues in the great solipsistic days of traditional genre sf, was that they were betrayed. They were betrayed – he allows his mouthpiece in the novel to say to the usual captive audience – by the liberals and bureaucratic apparatchiks who killed the space programme (we are perhaps meant to forget that in the real world the space programme was sabotaged by Richard Nixon). They were betrayed – his mouthpiece continues – by the “eco-fascist” environmentalists who regulated the atomic-power industry to death and banned plastic and individual initiative and stuff. Environmentalists – his mouthpiece says that anyone who calls him one had “better be quick on the draw” – are then pejoratively contrasted – by the doughy author alone in his studio – with true-blue “conservationists,” who are the only kind of folk who understand the true state of affairs, which is that the planet itself has been wasted. Environmentalists, ie eco-fascist-liberals, think everything will be solved if you colour-code your garbage. Conservationists, ie Poul and Gordie and Bob and Sundance, know better.

In the context of a novel in which nobody ever dares talk back to Mr Anderson's mouthpiece, this sort of thing is not only unutterably smug, it is also a lie, and it is a theft. It lies

about the environmentalists of this true and real world, whose central concern is precisely the wasting of the planet. And it steals from them the credit of having have brought to our attention circumstances which were in fact created by the kind of people Mr Anderson treats as the true planet-savers. It may be the case that real-life environmentalists displeasingly fail to imagine how fine it will be when arcologies in orbit dryclean humanity's dirty linen in the antiseptis of vacuum while simultaneously feeding energy from the sun onto the garden planet, for free, like Cargo. But the reason for this failure of imagination may be a sense that there is no time for fairy tales, however enticing, however cognition-rich, however full of potential down the line. Environmentalists' true task in this decade is to keep the garden alive. They're failing, of course. But the dream of space is for others (science-fiction readers included), because it's easy. It may be the last hope for the planet, but at the moment it is a fiction, and fiction is easy. The hard task (I prefer space myself: and I enjoy the conviction that space is our only out in part because it is easy to think so) is the day. Each one.

Whatever, *Harvest of Stars* is set on an Earth battered by yet another couple of centuries of having to abide us. For almost all of this time, Anson Guthrie (the “rambunctious individualist” who serves as the author's mouthpiece in the book) has owned and run Fireball Enterprises, a corporation he founded while still meat in order to move humanity into space, governments having lost their nerve (as in the real world). His physical body has died long before the novel starts, and Anson (Anson is Robert A. Heinlein's middle name: I can't place Guthrie: other recursive nudges include Anderson's two acknowledged pseudonyms) now exists as a download, a digital talking head of quite extraordinary volubility; occasionally he duplicates himself, which spins the plot. His opinions are forthright (see previous paragraphs); he is craggy, salacious, unstoppable, charismatic, immortal, deeply loved by the thousands of employees of Fireball. As the tale begins, he has gone missing in America.

One of Anson's employees (or “consortes,” a term which describes those members of staff who have taken

an oath of fealty to the firm) is a space pilot named Kyra, currently on Earth. She is secretly assigned to look for Anson Head, and plunges into the nightmare that America has become to see if she can find him. It is a world of scarcities, greenhouse sun, ozone melanomas, tricycles, mean-street enclaves. America itself is under the sway of a humourless fundamentalist Chinese-influenced totalitarian apparatchik-dominated regime which calls itself Avantism: how it took over a land Anderson cannot keep himself from describing in terms of cyber-punkish complexity, it is not easy to understand, but not to worry: the whole shebang is a mcguffin, and the novel is bound elsewhere.

Kyra has soon found Anson Head in a hideyhole. Why Anson Number One Head ever left the sanctuary of Fireball near-space to dribble around totalitarian America like a rogue, footloose basketball it is not easy to understand, but not to worry: Kyra soon finds his hideyhole and they embark upon a long hegira, bouncing gaily over land and sea and into space, meeting guys and gals aglow with Fireball Right Stuff Gumption en passant. What has caused Anson to carom into America is his fear that the Avantists have kidnapped Anson Number Two Head, a download Anson just back from visiting a nearby star which Fireball hopes eventually to colonize; and that they have rewired him into an Avantist like them, so that he will (like them) advocate an impersonal genetic transcendentalist outcome for the human enterprise, an outcome whose wry depiction in *Harvest of Stars* (one suspects) may constitute a kindly shot across Greg Bear's bows. But not to worry, Anson Number Two Head is no match for the head Head, Avantism collapses after an abortive space war, and the plot stops short – or seems to – halfway through the book.

If it were the case that Anderson's main goal was to compose a defence of and elegy for agenda sf and the coming to naught of the Future Histories its honchos dreamed up for us, then indeed *Harvest of Stars* could stop here, as surly and silly as a porcupine on a motorway. But something very different is in fact happening. Like H.G. Wells describing the “muddle” of South-East England to excuse wiping it off the map in the blink of

an eye, Anderson seems to have spent 200 pages on an agenda-sf nightmare vision of the wrong world-to-come in order to leave it. During these pages we have spent quite a bit of time on the Moon with a bioengineered species of aristocratic elves who are sexually irresistible to humans (like, for instance, Kyra); and it did seem rather odd to have them consort in the same book with a dystopia and a mundane Head. But now it all begins to come clear. The elves turn out to be an essential component in the great engine of escape for humanity which Anderson has shaped the second half of *Harvest of Stars* to describe.

It is, perhaps, orthodox. Anson Number One Head focuses the vast resources of Fireball on the construction of a fleet of starships, and emigrates with Kyra and much of the Fireball staff and the metamorph elves, through the time dilations of Einsteinian space, to a nearby habitable planet. New starts and crises and endings succeed one another for the next 200 pages, in perhaps the most sustained and emotion-laden sequence of sense-of-wonder slingshots ever composed in one sf novel. There are a few more sillinesses, which it would be churlish to reflect upon; and a perhaps slightly distasteful sense of great oceanic relief that the problem pit of Earth has been abandoned. (Back on the home planet, which AIs have transformed into a Garden while pursuing their own indecipherable goals, the surviving human stock has become pastoral, fleecy.) But the abiding sense is of lift-off. *Harvest of Stars* could not have been written without the compost of agenda sf to fire it; nor could it have become a significant novel of the 1990s if it had not burned that compost to ash.

Alfred Coppel's *Glory* (Tor, \$21.95), which is Book One of *Goldenwing Cycle*, needs nothing but blanket plaudits, with small cavils. It is strong, cleanly constructed with an utterly professional control of the medium, compelling, romantic, sweeping, moderately wise, melancholy but energetic, ongoing. Only one sf writer is referred to in the text, Gene Wolfe, and it may be that the ship that takes Severian to the stars in *The Urth of the New Sun* (1987) influenced the Goldenwing starships of this series as much as, say, the earlier clippers of Cordwainer Smith. In a universe which observes Einsteinian constraints – its increasingly common adherence to the physics of space may be a sign of post-agenda sf's recognition that the universe is no longer a pinball machine to play Westerns on, but humanity's only probable egress from the toilet: whatever the reasons, it is surely welcome – Goldenwings link the human worlds tenuously together,

conveying cargo and data from one precarious enclave to the next. There are few of them left. They shine in the dark. Glory be.

Coppel's first genre sf novel for about a decade deals with the consequences of the arrival of the almost-eponymous Goldenwing in orbit around the colony planet of Voerster, where a fossilized apartheid has (perhaps rather implausibly) maintained itself for something like a thousand years. Parts of the book are shaped into planetary-romance tours of Voerster and its unpleasing volk; other parts push the plot to the necessary culture-shaking climax. The frustrated empath wife of the ruler of Voerster finds sexual release and wisdom in the arms of Duncan, Captain of the Goldenwing *Gloria Coelis*, in free fall, but returns to Voerster to transform her world; her daughter, also an empath, becomes a member of the crew; there are rebirths and old deaths and a sonorous close and more to come.

David Brin's long new novel, *Glory Season* (Orbit, £16.99; Bantam, \$22.95), is set on an isolated planet named Stratos where, hidden from the stridor of the Phylum Worlds of humanity, it has proved possible to establish a utopian society run mainly by clone females, though males retain several sustaining roles in the complex sexual ecology which the Founding Mothers have created through adroit genetic engineering. Taking advantage of the complex Mini Long Year enjoyed by Stratos, the Founding Mothers have wired males so that they are sexually active only when summer triggers them, and for females so that they, in turn, are sexually active only when the glory season begins, at some point in the late autumn. Male/female summertime pairings generate "normal" offspring, who are called variants or vars (the protagonist of *Glory Season* is one); glory season joinings (uncommon, because it's hard to get men's danders up) serve only to spark a self-cloning female response. Strato society divides, therefore, into three groupings: males (none of them clones) who dominate certain occupations (like shipping) but who do not control the springs of power; vars, who feed vital genetic diversity into the world, but whose lives are generally spent attempting to found their own clone line; and clone families, each comprised of genetically identical sisters whose varying life experiences and whose varying ages give texture and variety to each clan, so that each individual clone both knows but does not quite fully know her sister, and her likely course in life, and the probable year of her death (cohorts by age, each separated from adjacent cohorts by about three Earth years, tend to die more or less together).

Brin traces the details of the complex sex and sortings mix that comprises Stratos through a not-untypical application of planetary-romance tropes: the coming-of-age quest of a young protagonist whose adventures amount to a guided tour of the world; the visiting alien (or porlock), whose perceptions ironize and destabilize the world on view; the sense of a history deeper and greater than can be comprehended over the course of one volume, by one protagonist or set of leads, a sense that Stratos is more encompassing than the cast which trails across it. Everybody talks a lot about the world they've live in, the society they made. It all knits together with a sound of sustained, cognitively enhanced, energized gossip, especially in autumn; a regular glory bee. The book is – for most of its length – a remarkably successful and astonishingly agreeable attempt to write what has always been an almost impossible category of fiction: the tale of utopia which does not become a tale of dystopia through the act of being told.

There are only three problems, really. (One): to achieve a liveable clone-and-sandwiches society, Brin has had to create a solar system whose oddities amount to a clear case of special pleading. (Two): He dodges (except by implication) the splendours and mysteries of sexual passion, homo or hetero, which makes his clones and his guys and his vars seem, at points, strangely half-baked: as though they weren't properly oven-tested. (Three): the pulp instincts that govern Brin's choice of event and plot-turn – the book is full of derring-does, abductions, secret passages, locomotives, disguises, betrayals, quarrels, wars, weapons, a lost twin who is found again, ancient knowledge, codes, piracy, mines, castles, fake hobos, double agents, coasts clear, coasts duplicitous, storms and shipwrecks – all make up a perfectly respectable pulp mélange, one which requires some sort of resolution or discharge. But it looks very much as though the author had either always intended to write a sequel, but miscalculated the rhythm of the first volume; or discovered part way through *Glory Season* (the book runs to 600 pages) that he was never going to get his tale told before running out of paper. The last pages collapse abjectly like something pricked, without even time for a false climax. The protagonist assumes that the alien has died in an escape attempt, but has not seen the body (therefore he is alive). She has also just got back together with her twin, and has not yet had any time to compare notes. Humanity is en route through space – once again, it's Einsteinian – to resume contact with Stratos by force. The book is still, to be short about it, untold. The author is reportedly now

involved in a continuation of his "Uplift" sequence. So it may be a long wait before we can put *Glory Season* to bed.

At first glance, it's a Barbara Cartland writes *The Difference Engine* shokku! At first glance, Christopher Evans's *Aztec Century* (Gollancz, £15.99) seems, in other words, almost dementedly content to present as gospel the first-person narrative of its protagonist, Princess Catherine, daughter of a dead king of England in an alternate world dominated by an Aztec Empire, as she struggles with her scruples against the enticements of marriage to the heir to the Mexican throne. It is around 1990 or so. Centuries have passed since Europe was devastated by an Aztec plague (rather than the other way round, as happened, far more plausibly, in our own world), and three years have passed since London was invaded by "the enemy's luminous golden ships," which she continues to see in her dreams. She and her English husband and her petulant sister and a mysterious Welshman named Bevan have been holed up in the Sirhowy Valley, waiting for no one quite knows what. They decide to try to escape to Russia, but are betrayed. She is taken prisoner, and removed to London, where she meets Extapan, governor of Britain, son of the Emperor of all the Aztecs, and very polite too. But she remains extremely haughty, as befits a princess of the blood royal; and conspires with Bevan to work against the regime.

This does not do her, or her fellow conspirators, much good; and it is at this point that one begins to wonder whether Evans intends her to be exactly reliable as a narrator. When she starts confiding delicate information to the AI which is housed within the Aztec central computer net, and which bears the aspect of her (presumably) dead husband, then wonder turns to certainty, with a great deal of relief, because the AI has to be a plant. (It is.) The Princess Catherine, as she gradually reveals herself to us, is not only an utter pain in the ass, not only an interfering sanctimonious stiff-necked busybody (even she admits she tends to being "meddlesome"), but also a devastating tool in the hands of her enemies. Through her unctious and naïveté, she manages to cause the deaths of millions of Russians; she decimates the anti-Aztec underground by blabbing everything she knows to the supposed AI who looks like hubby; she misunderstands the motives and the actions of everyone around her; she despises the only good people in the novel, and sucks up (though not until she has spent much of the book pretending she'd rather die first) to those who despise her.

It is an astonishing portrait, and

something of a triumph of narrative self-abnegation on the part of Evans, who wears her aspect so smoothly that he runs the risk of disappearing altogether, making us think we have lost him somewhere, or that he simply does not know the virtues of the world he has dreamed up. But the danger is not really very great. Princess Catherine's response to the marmoreal golden sclerosis of the Aztec world is so wrong-headed, condescending, priggish and noisy that we are left no choice but to read between the lines, and to register some sense that this alternate world Evans has created (and which we perceive whenever the Princess's psychic racket moderates for a moment or two) is not, in fact, at all negatively conceived. The real problem with the book is that we're only given glimpses of the new world, for we are deafened throughout, thanks to Evans's perverse skill in sticking to her like glue, by the spinster preen of the Royal. We cannot be blamed, perhaps, for wishing he had given us more, for wishing we'd been able to taste a few further glories uncorroded by her salt mouth.

(John Clute)

Outré and Colourful

Chris Gilmore

Jack Vance's *Throy* (New English Library, £15.99) is the third novel in his "Cadwal Chronicles," preceded by *Araminta Station* and *Ecce and Old Earth* (both reissued in paperback by NEL at £5.99).

One of Vance's many talents is for the creation of outré and colourful, but self-consistent, future or alien societies. They vary greatly in detail but all have certain textures in common, and all are informed by his own social and ethical philosophy. This seems to derive mainly from Spengler and Spencer, though in such a connection I would never discount the likelihood of parallel creation. In the second of these books it is stated in uncompromising terms:

[The Shadowmen are] the textbook case of isolated Gaean settlers who, over the centuries, have developed a unique society with intricate conventions. These conventions become ever more elaborate and generate ever greater intricacy until eventually they control, dominate and finally strangle the society, which thereupon becomes moribund. The process always bewilders the casual observer who contrasts the Golden Age of the society with its contemporary squalor. Most often the process is associated with a powerful religion and an insensate priesthood...

The society posited in *Araminta Station* exemplifies this theory, although the priesthood is lacking. As the book opens it is still in its late Golden Age: the culture may be somewhat inbred but life is ample and gay, showing only early signs of ossification.

The planetary nature-reserve, Cadwal, supports only two "official" human settlements, *Araminta Station* and *Stroma*. *Stroma* caters to the needs of bona fide visiting naturalists (for which read "tourists," mostly) while the business of the self-sufficient *Araminta Station* is to protect the planet from would-be exploiters. The population of the Station is in theory limited to 240, equally divided among six great Houses. While there has grown up a certain laxness of interpretation, so that children, servants and retired persons don't count, it is a matter of supreme importance to be formally accepted as a full member of one's House, and this depends almost entirely on lineage. Failure at a test of general ability excludes dullards, but there is no mechanism to guarantee a place for lowborn genius.

There is also an unofficial colony, *Yipton* on *Lutwen Atoll*, hideously overcrowded home of the Yips. These descendants of runaway servants and petty criminals are ruled by institutionalized gangsterism at home; in the official colonies they are *Gastarbeiter* used as cheap labour, servants and prostitutes but allowed very limited legal and human rights. They have consequently developed a group persona which is callous, devious, venal and resentful, while their unhappy existence has imposed a communal guilt complex on the official colonies, manifesting itself variously according to individual temperament. Towards the end of *Throy* one Yip comments, vis-à-vis his murder of a woman who had offered him no harm, "This was a creature brought from an alien world and given the best, while in *Yipton* we were not considered human." It's typical of Vance's gradualist moral stance that while he is not beguiled by such an argument, neither does he fail to recognize its corrupting influence over *les damnés de la terre*. To understand all is not of necessity to forgive anything, only to give due weight to mitigating and aggravating circumstances alike.

Araminta Station opens on this unstable milieu with two men of genius living, apparently content, outside the magic 240, while two young men are growing to maturity in *Clattuc House*, and exemplifying Vance's theories of developmental psychology. *Glawen Clattuc* has no mother – she drowned in a mysterious accident when he was three – so he is brought up by his strong, upright and self-contained father; *Arles Clattuc* has for father a nonentity, and for mother the

noisy, pushy and conspicuous Spanchetta. The contrast between them, in their enmity, rivalry and enforced propinquity, provides the matter of the first half of the book.

In the second half the sinister activities of the two semi-alienated geniuses, inevitably involving the Yips, provide the story. But although there is plenty of mystery, mayhem and suspense, the virtue of this book lies in those aspects that are more typically Vance's own. We find the jewelled dialogue and ingeniously described places and incidents that are his hallmark, but there are also some marvellous observations of human nature. I single out particularly the sustained passages in which the frightfulness of privileged youths, glorying in their new and untried manhood, is exposed in all its horror. I would defy anyone to better this, or the nail-biting sequence when Glawen is forced to go on a delicate and dangerous mission accompanied by a mentally unstable subordinate of doubtful loyalty and worse than doubtful commitment, who nonetheless requires to be consulted as an equal before anything can be done.

Glawen himself is not without human weakness. He is no less a product of his environment than the rebarbative Arles, and shares its assumptions. To him, the fact of being "a Clattuc of Clattuc House" (as Arles is) looms far larger than his personal merits and achievements, nor is he any sort of super-hero; being unarmed, and witnessing a gruesome mass-murder of Yip girls, he doesn't attempt to intervene, only to ensure that the perpetrators are apprehended.

The second and third volumes continue directly from the first, but offer somewhat less. They also offer summaries of their predecessors, which I advise no one to read, since if you don't like *Araminta Station* you certainly won't like the others. Cadwal's status as a nature reserve is in danger from those who would like to carve it into great estates for themselves, which involves Glawen and his girlfriend Wayness on separate missions to recover documents vital to scotch such dastardly plans. It's pleasant to have an extended solo female lead, and the weird societies, incidents, dialogue, etc., are as polished as ever, but the existing characters are fully developed now and acting under fewer constraints. As such, they have less inherent interest.

I can't help suspecting that Vance feels the same way. Especially in *Throy*, there is a distinct sense that loose ends are being tied up. The new characters seem slightly lost, as if they had arrived only after the other guests had started looking for their coats. No positively bad writing, but both later

books occasionally throw up this sort of thing: "No one paid Glawen the slightest heed; he might have been invisible for all the attention he aroused." This is a sentence of two coordinate main clauses, faultless in construction and euphony; but each says substantially the same thing. Vance should have decided which he wanted and cut the other. I would fault no one else for such a tiny lapse, but it's not the only one, and a master stylist is judged by higher standards than a common Booker Prize contender, whose novel will doubtless be out of print forever in five years or less. Vance is still, as he deserves, earning royalties from work he did in the 1950s; of him to whom much has been given, much is expected. Wouldst have it otherwise?

In her previous books, *Wolfking* and *The Lost Prince*, Bridget Wood adopted a somewhat childish style to afford a fetching contrast with the episodes of torture, murder and unnatural rape which befall her characters. *Rebel Angel* (Headline, £16.99) takes it further, with a distinctly twee opening on the small planet Renascia, whither a segment of humanity has fled to escape the Apocalypse which has overwhelmed Old Earth. There they have established a polity halfway in character and credibility between Browning's Hamelin and Toytown. But alas! Renascia is menaced by something which may be almost totally unlike a black hole, but which nonetheless seems set to swallow the place up.

Four only, taking shelter in the ancestral spaceship, escape; first into the corridors of time, subsequently into Wood's favoured milieu of Dark Age Ireland. Fenella, her brother Floy and the two bachelor archivists Snodgrass and Snizort are rescued by the rebel angel of the title, Fael-Inis, who needs their aid against Inchbad, King of the Gruagach – cannibal giants with very small penises – who has wrested Tara the Bright from the Wolfkings, and is now proposing to marry Fael-Inis's bastard daughter. Fael-Inis then vanishes for most of the book, for the obvious reason that such a powerful character would overbalance the plot.

The law of inverse association demands that as the language becomes more arch, so the action must grow more unseemly. Sho' nuff, the very small penises are soon on display, in a pissing contest against red-hot stones which will next be used to heat up the spikes whereon certain human prisoners are impaled before being eaten. One wonders what next; *American Psycho* rendered into babytalk, perhaps? (A fairly easy project, come to think of it; I wonder who'll take it on?)

Meanwhile Fenella's party encounters the handsome, cynical galant

Nuadu Airgetlam, last and illegitimate prince of the Wolfline of Cormac Mac Airt. He has the predictable effect of such a princeling on such an innocent young girl – having persuaded her to accompany him on a harebrained mission into Tara itself, he leads her to a couch of pine-needles where he pops her hymen in double quick time, though skimping none of the psychedelic sideshows proper to such occasions. That accomplished, he is promptly captured by the Robemaker, a sinister necromancer, so that Miss Wood can perform her usual trick of sustaining suspense by sundering the principals.

The trouble is, it's all a bit laboured. In the first two books sheer exuberance and a certain louche charm let her get away with serial murder in the way of creaking plot mechanisms, flagrant loose ends, idiot plotting, protean characters, mangled references and pre-adolescent psychology. But now it's getting a bit stale and more than a bit repetitive; there are some especially tedious gnomes, and though things pick up later on, when Miss Wood stops trying to be funny and gets down to the mutilation, dismemberment and bestiality which she does best, by then the writing has started to come between the reader and the characters, with consequent loss of interest. I can still imagine 14-year-olds giggling over this book under the covers by torchlight, but not, I think, so often; they steal a glance at the thickness yet unread, and swallow a yawn – naughtiness is so demanding! And why does she pretend not to know a dryad from a naiad? In short, it's time for Miss Wood to grow up. You can pose as a schoolgirl at 22, but the gymslip will look thoroughly naff well before you're 30. I'd look forward to her next effort with greater pleasure could I be sure that Tara would nowhere be mentioned therein.

(Chris Gilmore)

Chilly Pleasures

Pete Crowther

There's surely no greater labour of love in the world of publishing than the putting together of an anthology of new short stories. The almost Herculean efforts involved far outweigh the modest financial rewards, and the very fact that the editor sets him- or herself up as a judge of what the reader will like immediately invites criticism. And choosing a theme is, perhaps, the most difficult and potentially damning element of the whole exercise.

Looking back over recent years, the horror genre has had its share of

successes and brave failures. In the distinctly offbeat category there's Tom Monteleone's consistently excellent *Borderlands* series and Nicholas Royle's two outstanding *Darklands* books, both of which deal with the more surreal areas of the genre and, in so doing, bring an air of disquiet to the field rarely seen since the halcyon days of Arkham House's youth.

On the more visceral side there are, of course, the ubiquitous Stephen Jones and his co-editor David Sutton with their *Dark Voices* collections and another partnership, John Skipp's and Craid Spector's zombie grimoires, *Book of the Dead* and *Still Dead*. Some are less easy to pin down to specific themes, however. For example, J.N. Williamson's very readable *Masques* series and Douglas Winter's *Prime Evil* are excellent books but are not easy to pigeon-hole. Cemetery Dance mainman Richard Chizmar's *Cold Blood* set from last year is equally fine and similarly vague.

There are others, but tact – and, in one instance, lack of objectivity – prevents me from mentioning them here. However, one new collection just out on the racks (though, sadly, only on import) is very worthy of mention although its stated theme is a little slight and, as in the case of most anthologies, the divergence of style causes a few ups and downs. But when it is up, Stanley Wiater's *After the Darkness* (Macley; a 750-copy limited edition at \$50) is exceptional.

The premise is simply this: Wiater asked each of his contributors the age-old question of where the idea came from and then included the response – along with a thumbnail outro on the author – after each story. Thus... "After the Darkness."

The stories themselves get off to a wonderful start with Joseph Citro's "Kirby," a McCammonesque (or Bradburyesque for those with longer memories) evocation of childhood friendships. This beautifully realized story remains my personal favourite.

But there are other high points. Chet Williamson's octogenarian serial killer ("Perfect Days"); an ordinary couple who break their own rules and pick up a hitch-hiker... with very disturbing results (Richard Laymon's "I'm Not a Criminal"); two offbeat ghost stories in Les Daniels's "The Little Green Ones" and Gahan Wilson's delightfully spine-tingling "The Marble Boy"; Graham Masterton's haunting tale of a travelling salesman with a novel idea for companionship ("Making Belinda"); a nice study in paranoia, temporal displacement and loneliness (Thomas Tessier's "In the Desert of Deserts"); Nancy Holder's consideration of post-death possession... with erotically artistic overtones ("The Beard"); the always-excellent Ed Gorman and "Mother

Darkness," a slight case of irregular do-good-ery; William Nolan's tongue-in-cheek saga of cats and infidelity ("Special Treat"); an aspiring wordsmith and an established writer... but which is which? (J.N. Williamson's "God's Mouth to Your Ear"); Nancy Collins, always a "master" of the seedy vernacular, with a grim tale of the Manhattan underbelly ("Such a Good Baby"); and Tom Monteleone's eloquent "Love is the Prey," a continuation of the eponymous succubus/lamia character from his 1987 novel *Lyrica*.

The disappointments are few: Gary Raisor's ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful "Sometimes the Hands Remember"; Gary Brandner's "Disposal," which was just too close to Ellison's "Croatoan" for comfort; the usually dependable Rick Hautala and a story so predictable that simply mentioning the basic plot would render its telling superfluous; and Philip Nutman's wretchedly indulgent "Memories of Lydia, Leaving," a baring of soul that seems entirely out of place here.

That's just four mis-hits out of 17 stories, with at least half a dozen (Citro, Chet Williamson, Laymon, Masterton, Tessier and Wilson) of the remaining 13 worthy of consideration for best-of-the-year collections. Recommended.

And talking of recommended, if I had to pick my favourite single-author collection of the year right now, it would be Ken Wisman's *Weird Family Tales*, a slim (just 72 pages) chapbook released by the small-press publisher Earth Prime for a paltry \$3.75.

Wisman is a natural story-teller, brimming with affection and warmth both for both his craft and for humanity itself... with all its attendant gods, fables and beliefs.

Clearly inspired by the memorable short fiction of the great Lord Dunsany – in which the baroque worlds of faery and the supernatural are constantly at odds with contemporary society – Wisman mixes in liberal doses of Bradbury's bizarre family get-togethers from "Homecoming" and "Uncle Einar," plus a generous helping of the headily (but always gently) humorous friendships you can only experience in Callahan's (and, of course, Spider Robinson's) out-of-kilter sidestreet saloon, to create stunning word-pictures of the commonplace shot clear through with strangers.

Using a first-person narrator reminiscent of Robinson's Jake, Wisman introduces us to members of the most supernaturally blighted (and large!) family in the field: a composer whose piano is constructed from an old tree in which a wood-nymph has made her home ("Brother Senechelle");

an eight-foot dentist who is hopelessly in love with the inhabitant of a large cocoon which appears in his room ("Brother Endle"); a globe-trotter who learns the ancient Himalayan art of matter materialization and is subsequently and tirelessly pursued by a mysterious monk-figure ("Uncle Endrik"); a bizarre bed constructed of whalebone which transports its occupants to a dark metaphysical sea and its seemingly lone inhabitant, a constantly size-doubling shark ("Captain Seofon"); a failed magician who just may be more – much more! – than a simple prestidigitator ("Cousin Severin"); a mousy and introverted woman, part do-gooder/part computer-programmer, who changes egos with her cat... and then wonders what the cat is doing in her body ("Sissy Nin"); and twins whose Parallax Windows, a carefully placed pair of facing mirrors, permit the entering of thousands of alternate worlds and realities... with the only problem being that the journeys can become dangerously addictive ("Septima/Septimus").

These stories are indescribably good and Ken Wisman, a past Bram Stoker Award (Horror Writers of America) nominee on three occasions, is a classic fantasist. You probably won't find the book too easily outside of convention bookrooms, so do yourself a favour and order a copy (enclosing seven dollars in US currency – available from the likes of Thomas Cook – include postage) direct from: *Weird Family Tales*, Earth Prime Productions, PO Box 29127, Parma, OH 44129, USA.

The fantasy field is a small world indeed, and my mention of Lord Dunsany in the last review provides a pleasing link to Darrell Schweitzer's new collection, *Transients* (Ganley, \$8.95, paper; \$26.50, hardcover; and \$42.50 deluxe, signed and slipcased), by virtue of his *Pathways to Elfland*, an erudite re-appraisal of Dunsany's magical writings, and a marvellous companion volume to Mark Amory's 1972 biography.

That book is just one of several scholarly works from Schweitzer; his output includes books on Lovecraft and Howard, plus several fictional outings including *Conan the Deliverer*, a pretty good novel-length episode in the chronicles of everyone's favourite mighty-thewed Cimmerian (which Schweitzer affectionately claims to have co-written with the ghost of Howard himself), and *Tom O'Bedlam's Night Out* (also from Ganley, 1985), a collection of short stories which, though generally enjoyable, occasionally lean too closely to the verbosity of the more traditional fabulists.

But Schweitzer, a past assistant editor at *Asimov's* and *Amazing*, and

currently editor of the new *Weird Tales*, is no stranger to mainline horror, and *Transients* – with its exceptionally accurate subtitle, *And Other Disquieting Stories* – is a fine example. In this collection Schweitzer seems more at home, purveying (when he's on top form) a blend of downbeat tales and morose scribbings which could easily have resulted from collaborations between Richard Matheson and Ramsey Campbell.

The volume starts strongly with possibly the greatest *Twilight Zone*-type story ("Transients" itself) that never made it onto the small screen. It involves a man who suddenly feels that he's slipping out of reality and so leaves the house to play cards with some friends and get his head together. When he gets to the venue for the game, his friend doesn't know who he is. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts to expose the "joke," he returns home fearful of confronting his wife and daughter in case they don't know him either...

Other exceptional examples of a vein being currently and richly worked on this side of the Atlantic by Messrs Gallagher, Royle and newcomer Michael Marshall Smith, are "Jason, Come Home" – a poignant treatment of alienation and the desire to return to the simplicity of youth – and "Leaving," in which a man who gives up on life finds himself transported by a mysterious underground train to a new world of greyness in which similar miscreants live tramping huddled around burning trash containers. When he's good, Schweitzer's ideas are simple, evocative and powerful; and on the rare occasions that he misses the mark, it's only by a narrow margin.

With its glossy dust-jacket around illustrated paper covers, and exquisite interior illustrations from fan-favourite Stephen Fabian, *Transients* and *Other Disquieting Stories* is a splendid example of what the smaller publishers are capable of doing... and for a fraction of the cost of their big siblings. If you're unable to track it down then order direct (with an additional dollar to contribute to postage) from: W. Paul Ganley: Publisher, PO Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226, USA. Recommended... but bleak.

(Pete Crowther)

Shared Weerde

Peter T. Garratt

Boxtree Books' collaboration with Games Workshop to issue and reissue fiction set in the latter's universes has so far attracted more publicity for their court-case (see numerous

past mentions in "Ansible Link") than for getting into print. But six titles have now been issued, two new and four old.

Starting with the best of the reissues, *Drachenfels* by Jack Yeovil (Kim Newman; "Warhammer Fantasy") and *Inquisitor* by Ian Watson ("Warhammer 40,000" – a kind of Technogoth) were both deservedly well received by general sf reviewers. They confounded the sceptics by being well up to their authors' non-GW standard, and both deserve wider attention. *Drachenfels* in particular suffered from an inappropriate, non-eyecatching cover. This mistake has not been repeated, the new issues being smaller-format, slightly cheaper and with better covers, though the interesting internal artwork has gone. These books are well worth a read by those who missed their first time round as a result of not being keen on role-playing games.

Of the new books, Ian Watson's *Space Marine* is an imaginative and at times slyly humorous effort, but Watson has not done as well as in the more focused *Inquisitor* at overcoming the limitations imposed by the 40K game scenario. These are considerable. The Empire of the series is an extremely harsh and intolerant society, but dissent is unprofitable for the simple reason that its enemies are omnipresent and even worse. Watson deploys enough skill to keep the reader turning the page but not feeling very involved.

Also out are three episodes of David Ferring's "Konrad" sub-series of "Warhammer" fantasies: *Konrad*, *Shadowbreed*, and the new *Warblade*. (All books mentioned so far are Boxtree, £3.99.) *Warblade* was originally intended to be the last, but connoisseurs of sequel-seeding will notice plenty of opportunity for further adventures. This series has apparently been the most successful so far with its target market of gamers. My own feeling is that the action sequences are repetitive and a bit perfunctory (there is seldom a sense of a situation developing in which the hero, however outnumbered, might be in actual danger of losing) but that the general feel of a complex, fantastical world is impressive. David Ferring (better known as David Garnett) handles well the delicate task of drip-feeding information, lulling the reader into the world-view of his central character, who for a long time has little idea of what is going on around him. He avoids the mistake of allowing too much info to seep through the reader's suspension of disbelief.

The Weerde, Book 2: The Book of The Ancients devised by Neil Gaiman, Mary Gentle, and Roz Kaveney (Roc, £4.99) an entry in the "Midnight Rose" series of shared-

world anthologies, has many good stories but could have benefited from more attention to this problem of the drip-feed of information. The series deals with people's interactions with a mysterious race of beings who can pass as human but are not human, and who manipulate society from behind the scenes on an agenda which is entirely their own and older than history. They are the source of numerous legends of werewolves, vampires, etc., none very close to the truth.

The first anthology was full of good stuff, but to my mind the air of menace and mystery was reduced by the inclusion of too many stories told from the Weerde's own viewpoint. Much the same can be said for this volume. *Interzone* readers who want to see how their favourites cope with a shared-world formula will not be disappointed by the contributions from Colin Greenland, Molly Brown, Steve Baxter and Charles Stross. Also look out for the pieces by Liz Holliday and Michael Ibeji.

Roz Kaveney is the only one of the originators of the series to have a story in this volume, a direct sequel to her piece which was a highlight of the first book. It's an enjoyable mix of horror and humour, though again key information about the Weerde becomes apparent to the central character at an early stage. This reflects the fact that although this volume contains rather more stories told from non-Weerde viewpoints, they are scattered through the book, whereas I would have preferred to see them concentrated at the beginning.

On a different note, Eclipse have published a graphic novel of Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonflight* (£7.99; adapted by Brynne Stephens, illustrated by Lela Dowling, Cynthia Martin and Fred Von Tobel). The original novel started a popular series which it's fashionable to knock, but I've always liked it, and it's well suited to its new medium.

(Peter T. Garratt)

Psychos, Cops, Child-Molesters, and Such

Mat Coward

Editor's note: this is Mat Coward's final crime-fiction review column for *MILLION*, though we hope that he will continue to review other books for us from time to time.

When paramedic Shaw Chandler is called out to attend a shooting, and discovers that the victim is

his long-absent father, he heads home to Key West to discover why Dad ran off years ago and why he's been murdered now. The answer involves illegal disposal of toxic waste, a soap star with multiple sclerosis, and the most delicious, frightening pair of father-and-son psychos you could ever hope to avoid.

Bones of Coral (Mandarin, £4.99), a premier-league conspiracy thriller, is James Hall's third novel (the fourth is also out in hardcover), and already he's claiming the Florida Keys for his own, through neat landscaping, lovingly nasty characterization, and jagged wit – which is so much more than just the usual snap crackle'n'pop tough-guy banter – and above all the tightly-reined enthusiasm of his brutal, sexy, literate style. It's obvious on every page that Hall enjoyed writing this book almost as much as I enjoyed reading it.

Stephen Murray's **Offences Against the Person** (HarperCollins, £13.99) has to battle against a few self-inflicted minuses: for one thing, it's hard for anyone who reads the papers to really believe in a world where good cops jail bad cops ("Suspended police to take early retirement on medical grounds," said an *Independent* headline on the day I started reading this novel); for another, *Offences* is to do with organized child-molesting. The trouble with finding tomorrow's fiction themes in today's news bulletins, is that by the time your book appears you discover that every other author has had the same idea.

And then there's the religious aspect of Murray's story, in which we, and the characters, are asked to decide whether evil really exists. He refuses to give a party line on this question; which is admirably sophisticated but doesn't necessarily make for an easy read. The good news – not The Good News, note, just the good news – is that Murray knows what he's doing. He writes with fluent authority, though more confidently in the incident room than in the marital home, and *Offences Against the Person* is a gripping, inventive police procedural, in which regular character DCI Alec Stainton, and his tough but tender DS, Liz Pink, travel north to investigate a Yorkshire CID squad gone mouldy. To their horror, the scandal they gradually uncover is far worse than the one they were originally sent to deal with.

I get the impression that Paul Adam doesn't believe in perfect policing, either. He describes one of his characters, in **An Exceptional Corpse** (HarperCollins, £13.99), as "an old-fashioned cop, but not too old-fashioned. The real traditionalists knock suspects about for a bit in the interview room, then make up the evidence. Strange would just make

up the evidence, which I suppose is progress".

This promisingly readable first novel, by a Nottingham-based journalist, is full of such sharp lines – a little over-full, maybe, as the endless flip dialogue occasionally threatens to slow down the action. It also has to be said that there is a fair amount of corn floating about in Mr Adam's chowder; if you thought you'd never again read the scene where the criminal mastermind ties up the hero and his dame while he tells them the whole story, before handing them over to a pair of hoods for disposal, you were wrong. And while I'm at it, I would advise the author to stick to his own territory. His cockneys sound like George Cole did in his child-star days, and, believe me, it's been quite a while since "in London no one buys a flat to live in. They buy it to make money."

The story itself however – prominent Sheffield businessman dies in an RTA, apparently pissed; slobbish but dogged freelance reporter smells a scoop when he discovers that the late money-maker was a teetotal Quaker – is fine, and leads to a neatly-paced, very physical night-time denouement on the moors, which left my nails well-bitten, John, as we say down south.

Joe Sixsmith is not the first unemployed manual worker to take up private eyeing in recent fiction, but Reginald Hill separates him from the pack a bit by setting **Blood Sympathy** (HarperCollins, £13.99), Joe's first full-length outing, in Major's recession rather than Thatcher's, and in Luton instead of Leeds – although the flavour of the book seemed to me, even so, to be more northern than south-eastern.

Sixsmith, "a short, black, balding, redundant lathe-operator," fits easily into the tradition of British private detectives; he's a one-man operation, slow on the uptake, not really cut out for the work, inclined to get beaten up fairly regularly, but honest and intuitive enough to win through in the end. This novel, the first in what I'm sure will be a series as long and successful as Hill's Dalziel and Pascoe stories, is a highly enjoyable package of fun, involving heroin smugglers, multiple murder, witchcraft and arson.

The protagonist, who doesn't use any foul language stronger than "Oh, shoot!", because he was brought up to know better, is as engaging a character as one would expect from this author, and his assistant – a badly-behaved booze-hound of a cat called Whitey – is a real gem. Perhaps dialogue like "I say, you're that detective chappie aren't you? What on earth are you doing here?" doesn't quite ring true, but it's made up for by some vintage Hill humour, as in: "Whitey hadn't followed his usual practice of opening the lowest desk drawer and climbing in, but was sitting upright as an

Egyptian artefact, apparently rapt by Ms Baker's speech. 'I'm sorry. Is he bothering you? Whitey, get in your drawer. You can listen just as well there'."

The supernatural also plays a part in **Cat's Paw** (Sinclair-Stevenson, £14.99), the second in a series by Michael Molloy, former editor of the *Daily Mirror*. A vicious gang war flares in north London, as rival Irish mobs struggle for control of an empire of vice, and three main characters pursue their interconnecting paths towards a violent resolution: Superintendent Colin Greaves, gangland specialist; his girlfriend, Sarah; and her colleague on the *Gazette*, Cat Abbot, whose dying career desperately needs one big break – and gets it, when his interview with a clairvoyant named Doreen puts him one step ahead of the fuzz.

This is an unmistakably tabloid novel – not in the pejorative sense, but in the sense of lively, fast, varied, disciplined, colourful and characterful. At its best, popular journalism, like popular literature, is all about people, while the self-styled serious writers concentrate on detached, abstract analysis. Molloy makes sure that the human element is always at centre-stage, and I'll certainly be looking out eagerly for his next book.

I don't think I'll bother with George V. Higgins again, though, even if I feel duty-bound to point out that he is one of the most respected practitioners of the crime genre; so if you haven't yet tried him – as I hadn't before being sent his latest for review – you'd be well advised to give him a whirl, and see what you reckon. **Defending Billy Ryan** (Little, Brown, £15.99) is Higgins's third dip into the casebook of Jerry Kennedy, a bright but bruised Boston attorney, who takes on the defence of a notoriously corrupt Commissioner of Public Works. I can't tell you if the story is any good, because at the half-way point, which was where I jumped ship, it hadn't really started yet. Higgins has a way of taking 15 pages to say "The man opened the door," and then, when he has said it, you find out it's got sod-all to do with the plot anyway. He writes like what he is, a law lecturer, and is probably one of those authors you either love or hate.

No such problems with **Bye-Bye Baby** (HarperCollins, £13.99), David Delman's latest case for husband-and-wife team Helen and Jacob Horowitz (he's a cop, she's private). It's a sufficiently straightforward whodunnit to appeal to most tastes, and good enough not to disappoint. The world's most famous female tennis player, Baby Robin Cantrell, takes a break from her farewell tour to attempt the seduction of her academic

ex-husband, Bry. When she gets herself bumped off, Bry is firmly in the frame. He does a runner, leaving Jacob to hunt him down while Helen tries to prove his innocence. The tennis setting provides plenty of amusing suspects, which compensates for a slightly weak ending.

Let's close with a bit of real class: **Christoferus or Tom Kyd's Revenge** (Sinclair-Stevenson, £14.99), a very superior history-mystery by Robin Chapman. Four hundred years ago, the rebel playwright Christopher Marlowe was killed in Deptford, aged 29, apparently as the result of a pub brawl. In this gloriously entertaining, constantly fascinating novel of speculation, Chapman – former actor, and Marlowe enthusiast – suggests an explanation of the background to these events, which allows him to investigate the nature of the State in Elizabethan England.

The narrator is Tom Kyd, Marlowe's good friend and fellow playwright, who, as the story opens, is recuperating in the country from his terrible experiences at the hands of the Queen's secret police. He blames himself for Marlowe's arrest and subsequent death, having, under pressure of torture, damned him as an atheist. Kyd comes to realize that only by discovering, and taking revenge upon, those who led him to this betrayal will he ever be able to reclaim his own life.

Having no previous knowledge of the events described, I found the fruits of Chapman's research mesmerizing. *Christoferus* is written with a keen eye for the often startling modern parallels, especially in the scene detailing Kyd's arrest, which reads like a passage from any contemporary hard-boiled account of law in LA. In that Elizabethan age, as in this, "the state itself's a criminal" – though admittedly, the virgin Eliza seems to have been readier to arrest, torture, "disappear," and arrange accidents for her opponents, than is our own King John (or even Queen Maggie). Tom Kyd's London, quietened by the plague and rotten with discontent, also produces eerie echoes of today's crumbling, corrupt capital.

This is an espionage story of rare quality, which, instead of foppishly "transcending" the genre, revels in its conventions and techniques to produce a novel of feverish readability and lasting impact. Let's just hope it doesn't win the Booker, otherwise nobody'll ever read it.

(Mat Coward)

Books Received

April 1993

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Arnason, Eleanor. **Ring of Swords**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85518-4, 382pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the author, who has previously written a couple of fantasy books, won the James Tiptree Award for her first sf novel, *A Woman of the Iron People*.) August 1993.

Banks, Iain M. **The State of the Art**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-030-2, 216pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in 1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 48.) 27th May 1993.

Blaylock, James P. **Lord Kelvin's Machine**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21423-2, 244pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 61.) 10th May 1993.

Bloch, Robert. **Once Around the Bloch: An Unauthorized Autobiography**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85373-4, 406pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Autobiography of a major horror/sf/fantasy writer, first edition; proof copy received; Janet Leigh, star of the film *Psycho*, is quoted on the cover as saying, "I knew I would love this book as soon as I saw the title!") July 1993.

Brin, David. **Glory Season**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-069-8, 600pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 27th May 1993.

Broderick, Damien. **The Sea's Furthest End**. Aphelion Publications [PO Box 619, North Adelaide, S.A. 5006, Australia], ISBN 1-875346-07-4, 192pp, paperback, Australian \$12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; a new space opera by the author of *The Dreaming Dragons* [1980] and *The Judas Mandala* [1982], it appears to be an expansion of his very first published story, "The Sea's Farthest End" [New Writings in SF 1, 1964].) No date shown: received in April 1993.

Byrne, John. **John Byrne's Next Men, Book One**. Dark Horse Comics, ISBN 1-878574-70-1, unpaginated [over 100 pages], trade paperback, \$16.95. (Sf graphic novel; first edition; for some reason, Dark Horse Comics in Oregon, USA, have suddenly begun to bombard us with comics material, of which this and the Prosser/Aliens title listed below are perhaps the most interesting items; sorry, we don't have room to list the rest.) Late entry: March publication, received in April 1993.

Calder, Richard. **Dead Girls**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-22415-4, 206pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the debut book by a talented new British writer who lives in Thailand, it's expanded from his story "Mosquito" which appeared in *Interzone* 32; unfortunately, some confusion surrounds the publication of this book: when we enquired about it in January 1993, we were told that it had been "put back to the autumn"; then copies appeared in Forbidden Planet bookshop, circa March; now that we have the book in our hands, we see that it's copyrighted "1992"; so we don't know when it was published or, indeed, if review copies were sent out to anybody [we've seen no reviews]; all this reminds

us of the "invisible" way in which Random House/Legend slipped Greg Egan's *Quarantine* onto the market – a pity.) Late entry: March (or possibly earlier?) publication, received in April 1993.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Cold Print**. "First edition of the complete text." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4059-0, 500pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1985; this is described as a "complete and extended edition"; it contains the essays "Lovecraft: An Introduction" and "Chasing the Unknown" plus 21 stories, apparently all variations on a Lovecraftian "Cthulhu Mythos" theme.) 13th May 1993.

Clarke, Arthur C. **By Space Possessed**. "Essays on the Exploration of Space." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05596-0, 223pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Essay collection by a well-known sf writer, first edition; proof copy received; it consists of reshuffled material from many earlier Clarke books.) 1st July 1993.

Clarke, Boden, and Mary A. Burgess. **The Work of Katherine Kurtz: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide**. "Bibliographies of Modern Authors, Number Seven." Borgo Press, ISBN 0-89370-486-5, 128pp, trade paperback, no price shown. (Author bibliography, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; "Boden Clarke" is another pseudonym of "Robert Reginald," aka Michael Burgess.) No date shown: received in April 1993.

Cohen, Jon. **The Man in the Window**. Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99477-4, 240pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; a new whimsical-lyrical love tale by the American author [a latter-day Robert Nathan?] of *Max Lakeman* and *The Beautiful Stranger*, which was praised by Mary Gentle and Terry Pratchett.) 27th May 1993.

Coleman, Joe. **Cosmic Retribution: The Infernal Art of Joe Coleman**. Preface by Robert Crumb. Feral House/Fantagraphics Books [distributed in the UK by Turnaround, 27 Horsell Rd., London N5 1XL], trade paperback, 136pp, £16.99. ("Underground" horror/fantasy art portfolio, with text by the artist and an interview with him by Adam Parfrey; first published in the USA, 1992; this is the American edition now made available in Britain; highly imaginative, powerful and freaky stuff, it comes with a cover commendation from Charles Manson [ugh]; not for the faint-hearted.) 18th May 1993.

Cox, Greg. **The Transylvanian Library: A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction**. "Borgo Literary Guides, Number Eight." Borgo Press, ISBN 0-89370-435-0, 264pp, trade paperback, \$20. (Annotated bibliography of fiction about vampires, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at \$30 [not seen]; chronologically arranged, this is a chatty, informal but very informative guide to all the blood-sucker fiction from Polidori's "The Vampire" [1819] to the end of 1989; as the author ruefully admits in a 1991 afterword, a hell of a lot more has been published since; nevertheless, recommended.) No date shown: received in April 1993.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Year's Best Science Fiction, Tenth Annual Collection**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-09423-X, xiii+588pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains the best of 1992's crop of shorter fiction by such authors as Terry Bisson, Pat Cadigan, Arthur C. Clarke, L. Sprague de Camp, Greg Egan, Joe Haldeman, Kathe Koja, Ian McDonald ["The Best and the Rest of James Joyce," from *Interzone*], Ian R. MacLeod, Frederik Pohl, Robert Silverberg, Michael Swanwick, Ian Watson ["The

Coming of Vertumnus," from *Interzone*], Kate Wilhelm and Connie Willis; recommended.) June 1993.

Dumpleton, Daniel. **The Hounds of Death.** Dorrance [643 Smithfield St., Pittsburgh, PA 15222, USA], ISBN 0-8059-3306-9, 89pp, \$9.95 or £4.95. (Horror novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer.) 16th April 1993.

Eddings, David. **The Shining Ones: The Tamuli, Book Two.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13846-7, 474pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received.) 2nd August 1993.

Evans, Christopher. **Aztec Century.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05538-3 and 0-575-05540-5, 352pp, hardcover and trade paperback, £15.99 and £8.99. (Sf novel, first edition; an alternative-timeline novel in which the Aztecs rule 20th-century Britain.) 20th May 1993.

Gorman, Ed. **Shadow Games.** Blake Publishing [158 Fulham Palace Rd., London W6 9ER], ISBN 1-857820-31-2, 253pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; this is the first Gorman title we've ever been sent for review; he's an American writer, but this item appears to be a British paperback-original; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *MILLION* 14.) Late entry: March (?) publication, received in April 1993.

Greenland, Colin. **Harm's Way.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-223916-7, 364pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 20th May 1993.

Gribbin, John. **Innervisions.** Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017447-8, 165pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first edition.) 6th May 1993.

Haldeman II, Jack C., and Jack Dann. **High Steel.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-93163-8, 252pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 73.) July 1993.

Hand, Elizabeth. **Icarus Descending.** Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-56288-6, 334pp, paperback, \$5.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; third book in the sequence which began with *Winterlong* and *Aestival Tide*.) August 1993.

Harman, Andrew. **The Sorcerer's Appendix.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-928471-5, 229pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer, this also seems to be the most careful attempt yet to emulate Terry Pratchett's style, as evidenced in the sentence which ends the first chapter: "Slowly, very, very quietly and with a certain sense of inevitability, Dawn broke.") 6th May 1993.

Harris, Robert. **Fatherland.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-926381-5, 386pp, paperback, £4.99. (Alternative-history novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 60; mysterious are the ways of popular fiction: why should a first novel on a hackneyed sf theme [Hitler won World War II] become a "bestseller throughout the world... translated into 22 languages," and be praised to the skies by the likes of Frank Delaney, Martha Gellhorn, Sheridan Morley, John Mortimer and Woodrow Wyatt?; it must be something in the way Mr Harris tells his tale; either that, or he's got a lot of very influential friends – or did the public mistake him for Thomas Harris?) 6th May 1993.

Harris, Steve. **Angels.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0675-9, 502pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 6th May 1993.

Hodge, Brian. **Nightlife.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32153-6, 404pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991; this

is by someone new to us, described as "one of America's best young writers of contemporary horror" and author of two previous novels, *Dark Advent* and *Oasis*.) 14th May 1993.

Holt, Tom. **Overtime.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-126-0, 312pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 71.) 27th May 1993.

Jafek, Bev. **The Man Who Took a Bite Out of His Wife and Other Stories.** Overlook Press [149 Wooster St., New York, NY 10012, USA], ISBN 0-87951-499-X, 275pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; a debut book by a new American writer; many of these sly and surreal stories could have appeared in *Interzone*; in fact, they appeared in sundry non-genre publications such as *Mississippi Review*, *Missouri Review* and *PulpSmith*; recommended.) 5th July 1993.

James, William. **The Other Side of Heaven: The Sunfall Trilogy, Book Two.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-127-9, 543pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition.) 27th May 1993.

Janes, Phil. **The Galaxy Game.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-058-1, x+212pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; a debut novel by a new British writer.) 13th May 1993.

Kenworthy, Chris, ed. **Sugar Sleep.** Barrington Books [Bartle Hall, Liverpool Rd., Hutton, Preston, Lancs. PR4 5HB], ISBN 1-897729-01-4, 125pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror/fantasy/sf/"slipstream" anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories by Rick Cadger, Chris Kenworthy, Joel Lane, D.F. Lewis, Nicholas Royle and others; a follow-up to the same editor's self-published *The Sun Rises Red*.) 29th April 1993.

Kerr, Katharine. **Days of Blood and Fire: A Novel of the Westlands.** Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37204-1, 402pp, trade paperback, \$11.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 16th August 1993.

Kilworth, Garry D. **Angel.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05523-5, 286pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf/horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; we don't know why a "D" has suddenly appeared in Garry's byline after all these years.) 17th June 1993.

King, Stephen. **Gerald's Game.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58623-5, 394pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 67.) 6th May 1993.

Knight, Harry Adam. **Bedlam.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05347-X, 215pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1992; "Harry Adam Knight" is a pseudonym for John Brosnan.) 22nd April 1993.

Lee, Tanith. **The Book of the Mad: The Secret Books of Paradys, IV.** Overlook Press [149 Wooster St., New York, NY 10012, USA], ISBN 0-87951-481-7, 209pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the first two "Secret Books of Paradys" were published in Britain some years ago, but whatever happened to the third?) 28th July 1993.

Lem, Stanislaw. **Mortal Engines.** Translated and introduced by Michael Kandel. Deutsch, ISBN 0-233-98819-X, 239pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1977; Kandel's introduction dates from a 1992 American reprint; the individual stories were first collected in the Polish language in various volumes, 1971-1976.) 6th May 1993.

Lewis, D.F. **The Best of D.F. Lewis.** Introduction by Ramsey Campbell. TAL

Publications [PO Box 1837, Leesburg, VA 22075, USA], no ISBN shown, 54pp, paperbound, \$5.95. (Horror/fantasy collection, first edition; there are 15 pieces in this chapbook, most of them very short; although this is an American publication, D.F. Lewis is a prolific and much-praised British writer for small-press magazines.) April 1993?

Lieberman, Herbert. **Sandman, Sleep.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-08886-8, 376pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; by an author best known for his psychological crime/horror fiction, this new book [set in the 21st century] is blurred thus: "Imagine if Tolkien, the Brothers Grimm, H.G. Wells, and George Simenon had collaborated on a story about genetics, immortality, and murder; imagine if Inspector Maigret had come to the Island of Doctor Moreau to solve the riddle of Sleeping Beauty's ageless trance and you have something approaching *Sandman, Sleep*." Late entry: 31st March publication, received in April 1993.

Llywelyn, Morgan. **The Elementals.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86529-9, 300pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Ecological fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it has a cover commendation from Ronald Reagan [good grief].) June 1993.

Lumley, Brian. **The Last Aerie.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85358-0, 479pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; continues "the adventures of Nathan and Nestor, twin sons of the Necroscope" from the previous book in the series, *Blood Brothers*.) August 1993.

Masterton, Graham. **Burial.** Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-1372-2, 508pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1992.) 13th May 1993.

Oberndorf, Charles. **Testing.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-56181-2, 135pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novella, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1993.

Ore, Rebecca. **Alien Bootlegger and Other Stories.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85549-4, 313pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; it contains six long stories and an essay entitled "Aliens and the Artificial Other.") August 1993.

Phillips, Graham, and Martin Keatman. **King Arthur: The True Story.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-929681-0, 213pp, paperback, £5.99. (Popular history/mythography, first published in 1992; according to the *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, and about ten other provincial newspapers quoted on cover and flyleaf, this search for the historical Arthur and the reality behind Excalibur and the Grail is "fascinating," "convincing" and "remarkable.") 6th May 1993.

Piercy, Marge. **Body of Glass.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-015602-X, 584pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *He, She and It*, 1991; winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award for best sf novel published in Britain in 1992; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 63.) 6th May 1993.

Pratchett, Terry. **Johnny and the Dead.** Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40301-1, 173pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; follow-up to *Only You Can Save Mankind* in Pratchett's new "Johnny Maxwell" series.) 27th May 1993.

Pratchett, Terry. **Small Gods.** "A Discworld Novel." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13890-8, 381pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 60 – which review is quoted on the back cover of this paperback reprint: "Surely the best novel Terry Pratchett has ever written, and the best comedy.") 27th May 1993.

Roessner, Michaela. **Vanishing Point**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85213-4, 381pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second book by a fairly new writer whose fantasy novel *Walkabout Woman* received some praise in 1988.) July 1993.

Shatner, William. **Tek Lab**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32740-2, 223pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; third in the "Tek" series, rumoured to be ghost-written by Ron Goulart.) 14th May 1993.

Shatner, William. **Tek Vengeance**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32967-7, 224pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; fourth in the "Tek" series.) 14th May 1993.

Shepard, Lucius. **The Golden**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-56303-3, 291pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in 1993; proof copy received; Shepard's first new novel in some time, it's about a secret race of 19th-century vampires.) August 1993.

Smith, David Alexander. **In the Cube: A Novel of Future Boston**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85448-X, 286pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; that subtitle is hardly likely to excite the sf audience on this side of the Atlantic, or, one would have thought, anywhere in the USA outside Massachusetts.) August 1993.

Wells, H.G. **The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Variorum Text**. Edited by Robert M. Philmus. University of Georgia Press, ISBN 0-8203-1411-0, xlviii+239pp, hardcover, \$40. (Sf novel, first published in 1896; first edition in this form; the main body of Wells's classic novel occupies fewer than 100 pages of this attractively-produced 300-page book; the remainder of the volume consists of a long introduction by Professor Philmus, variant textual readings, copious annotations, and eight appendices [including one on "Moreau's Literary Children" and another on "Stage and Screen Adaptations"]; apparently the British and American first editions differed considerably, and there were many cuts and amendments made in other editions over the years; these are all described and accounted for in meticulous detail; this is an exhaustive work of scholarship, and it's possibly the first time a science-fiction text has been treated with such rigour; highly recommended to all Wellsians.) Late entry: 11th March publication, received in April 1993.

Wells, Martha. **The Element of Fire**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85374-2, 413pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut book by a new American writer; it's amusingly described in the proof's blurb as having "Errol Flynn panache and the feelgood atmosphere of the best of the MGM swashbuckling sagas" [but weren't the Flynn swashbucklers all produced by Warner Brothers?].) July 1993.

Whitaker, David. **The Power of the Daleks**. "Doctor Who: The Scripts." Edited by John McElroy. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-327-7, 191pp, paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile sf television script, first edition; irritatingly, Titan Books give all copyright dates on the reverse of the title page as "1993"; it's made clear in the introductory matter, however, that this script dates from 1966.) 22nd April 1993.

Williams, Walter Jon. **Aristoi**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21388-0, 448pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 69.) 10th May 1993.

Williamson, Philip G. **Moonblood**. "A Chronicle of Firstworld." Legend, ISBN 0-09-926071-9, 288pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; we are

told that the author, whose two previous fantasy novels were published by HarperCollins, has also written – under the pseudonym "Philip First" – the novels *The Great Pervader* and *Dark Night* and the collection *Paper-Thin and Other Stories*.) 4th March 1993.

Wilson, Colin, and Damon Wilson. **Unsolved Mysteries: Past and Present**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0837-9, 426pp, hardcover, £19.99. (Compendium of pseudo-scientific lore, first edition; Colin Wilson, best known for his non-fiction book *The Outsider* [1956], has written a number of sf novels; Damon Wilson is his son.) 6th May 1993.

Wright, T.M. **Strange Seed**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05507-3, 309pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1978; according to the blurb, it was "chosen by both Stephen King and Douglas Winter as one of the best horror novels of the last forty years.") 27th May 1993.

Wurts, Janny. **The Curse of the Mistwraith: The Wars of Light and Shadows, Volume 1**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224070-X, xiii+559pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 20th May 1993.

Novelizations, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds, Sharecrops

We have decided to drop the "Overseas Books Received" listing (and instead to incorporate foreign publications into the main alphabetical sequence). In its place, we are starting a separate list for the above sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror, since they are becoming so numerous. Elsewhere, such books often are tagged simply as "novelizations," but it seems to us that finer distinctions are called for. The new edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Clute & Nicholls) uses the term "tie" (short for tie-in) to label most such works, but we find that too vague also. For further comments on terminology, see David Pringle's "Of Sequels and Prequels – and Sequels by Other Hands" in *MILLION* no. 9; and watch out for our forthcoming feature on movie novelizations. We hope that readers find this new list useful.

Davids, Paul and Hollace. **Mission from Mount Yoda: Star Wars, Book 4**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40530-6, xiv+95pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 24th June 1993.

Davids, Paul and Hollace. **Zorba the Hutt's Revenge: Star Wars, Book 3**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40529-2, xiv+94pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 27th May 1993.

Gentle, Mary, and Roz Kaveney, eds. **The Weerde, Book 2: A Shared World Anthology**. "The Book of the Ancients." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016714-5, 386pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf/fantasy shared-world anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories by Stephen Baxter, Molly Brown, Colin Greenland, Liz Holliday, David Langford, Charles Stross and others; Neil Gaiman is prominently credited on the cover and title page as a "deviser," although it seems he did not in fact co-edit this book.) 29th April 1993.

Gilden, Mel. **The Starship Trap**. "Star Trek, 59." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-460-5, 242pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-series

spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993 [?].) 22nd April 1993.

Hawke, Simon. **The Romulan Prize**. "Star Trek: The Next Generation, 26." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-463-X, 279pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993 [?].) 20th May 1993.

McCaffrey, Anne, and S.M. Stirling. **The City Who Fought**. Baen, ISBN 0-671-72166-6, 436pp, hardcover, \$19. (Sf novel, first edition; this is the latest in a new "sharecrop" series based on Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang*; previous titles, which we haven't seen, are *PartnerShip* by Anne McCaffrey & Margaret Ball and *The Ship Who Searched* by Anne McCaffrey & Mercedes Lackey.) April 1993.

McConnell, Ashley. **Quantum Leap: Carny Knowledge**. Boxtree, ISBN 1-85283-871-X, 294pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993; this and the following title appear to be original stories based on Donald P. Bellisario's TV series, not adaptations of particular scripts; therefore they are best described as "spinoffs" rather than "novelizations"; this is a commoner phenomenon with TV-related fiction than many people realize; for example, the re-issued 1960s "Man from U.N.C.L.E." books listed here last month were spinoffs of a similar type; apparently, contractual and legal restraints prevent authors from novelizing many American TV scripts – the scriptwriters won't stand for it; this whole subject is an under-explored area of popular fiction which perhaps merits some research.) 29th April 1993.

McConnell, Ashley. **Quantum Leap: Too Close for Comfort**. Boxtree, ISBN 1-85283-876-0, 265pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993; see remarks in the preceding entry.) 29th April 1993.

Martin, George R.R., with Melinda M. Snodgrass, eds. **Card Sharks: A Wild Cards Mosaic Novel**. "Book 1 of a New Cycle." Baen, ISBN 0-671-72159-3, 452pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Sf/fantasy shared-world anthology, first edition; contributors include Michael Cassutt, Victor Milan, Laura J. Mixon, William F. Wu and Roger Zelazny.) Late entry: March publication, received in April 1993.

Morris, Dave. **HeroQuest: The Tyrant's Tomb**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-52777-7, unpaginated (circa 200 pages), paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile fantasy game-book, first edition; third in a series of spinoffs from "the bestselling fantasy board game," it's cast in interactive form – turn to numbered paragraph such-and-such.) 27th May 1993.

Pournelle, Jerry, and S.M. Stirling. **Prince of Sparta: A Novel of Falkenberg's Legion**. Baen, ISBN 0-671-72158-5, 383pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; part of a proliferating sharecrop series based on the universe of Pournelle's original "Co-Dominium" novels and stories; as Baen Books rarely send us material for review, this is a tale of a type which we see infrequently in Britain – the militaristic or "mercenary" sf novel; this one, which according to the back cover is "The Helot Wars, Part II," seems to be a follow-up to the same authors' *Go Tell the Spartans* [1991].) Late entry: March publication, received in April 1993.

Prosser, Jerry, and Kelley Jones. **Aliens: Hive**. "The Collected Edition." Dark Horse Comics, ISBN 1-878574-47-7, unpaginated [over 100 pages], trade paperback, \$13.95. (Sf graphic-novel spinoff from the *Aliens* films; first edition.) Late entry: February publication, received in April 1993.

Ryman, Geoff. "Was..." Flamingo, ISBN 0-586-09179-3, 456pp, paperback, £5.99. (Non-fantasy novel about fantasy, a sequel by another hand or "recension" of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*; first published in 1992; the title on cover and spine is given as *Was*, without the quote marks and ellipsis; concerning the "true story" of little Dorothy from Kansas, this moving book is highly recommended; see Kim Newman's interview with Ryman in *MILLION* 9.) 10th May 1993.

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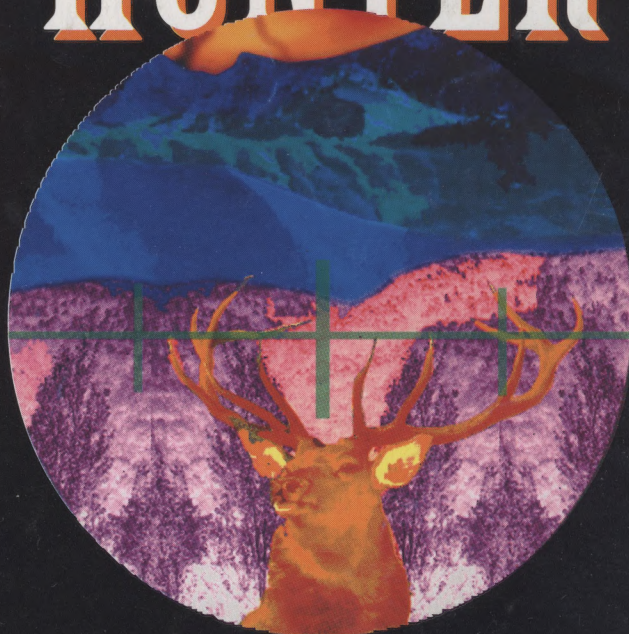
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